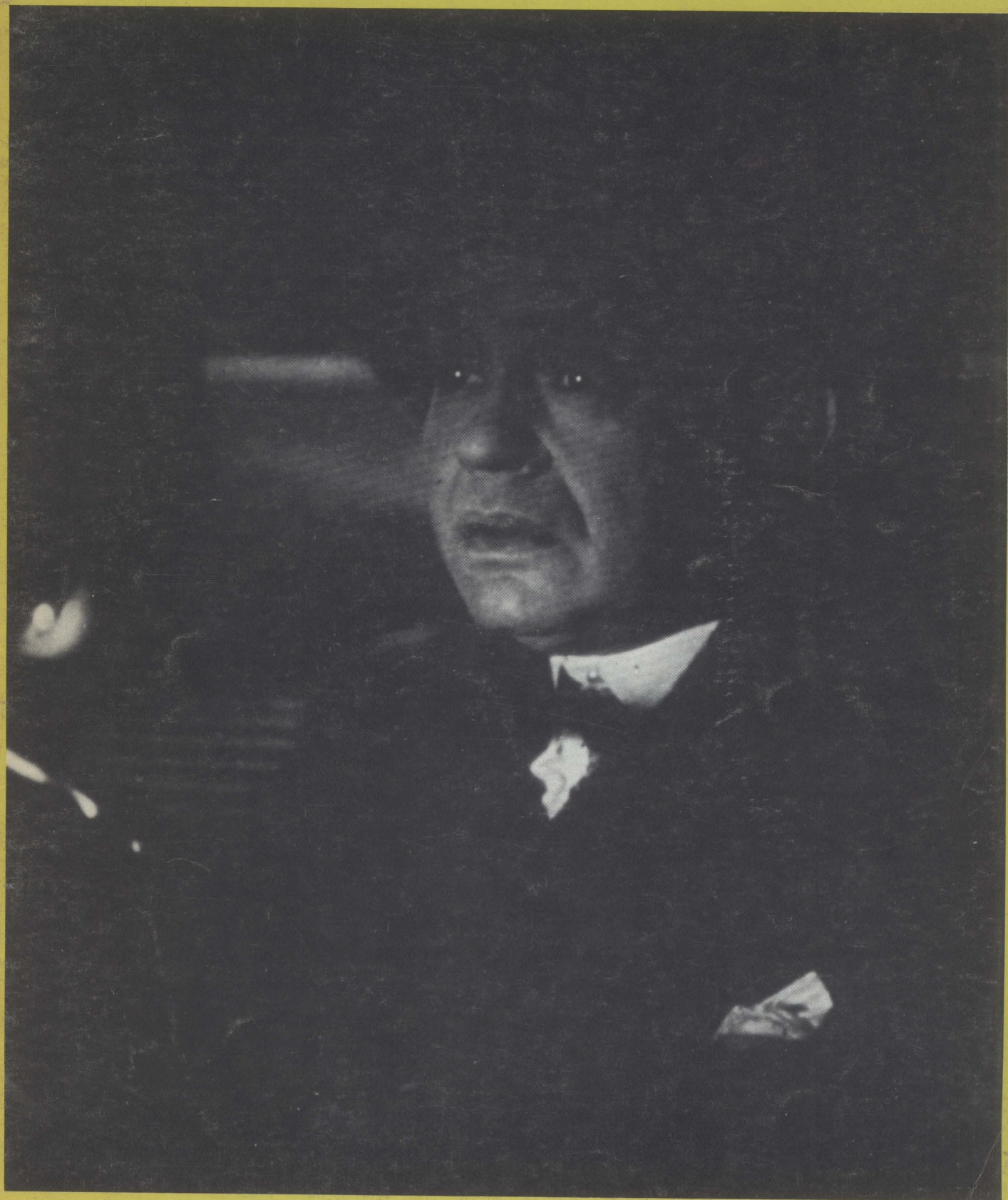




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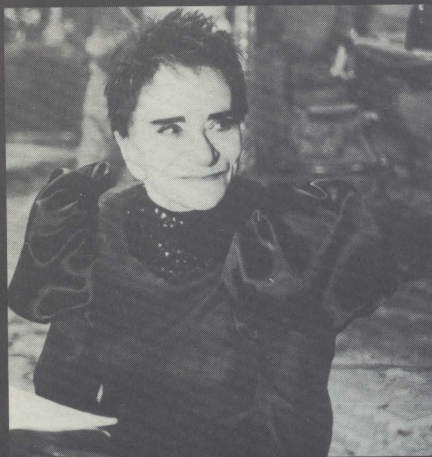
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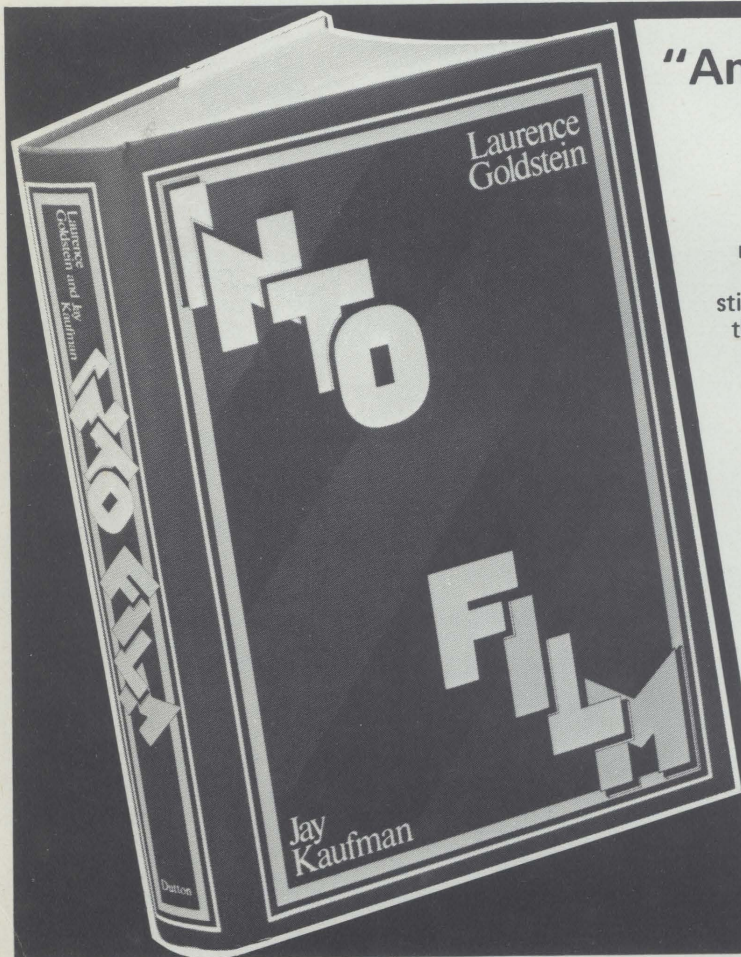
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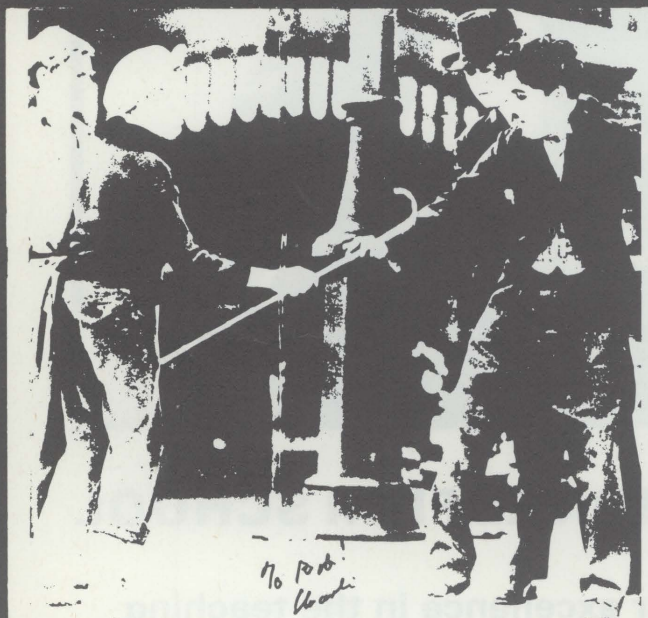
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The London Film Festival is open to the general public and tickets are available at the National Film Theatre from 5th November. Members of the British Film Institute receive advance notification of the Festival programme and can send in their postal bookings at the end of October. Full details about membership and the Festival are available from the Box Office, National Film Theatre, South Bank, Waterloo, London SE1 (Tel 01-928 3232/3) or from the Membership Department, British Film Institute, 81 Dean Street, London, W1V 6AA (Tel 01-437 4355).



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SIGHT AND SOUND

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On the cover: Edward G. Robinson in 'The Woman in the Window', directed by Fritz Lang who died on August 2, 1976. (See also the article 'No Way Out', p. 212)

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'Stay Hungry': off balance in the gym

STAYING VULNERABLE

John Russell
Taylor

An interview with Bob Rafelson

When *Five Easy Pieces* opened in 1970, at least part of its considerable impact came from the element of sheer surprise. It apparently came out of nowhere (who was Bob Rafelson anyway?), and it seemed like an extraordinary sport in the American cinema, exciting at once some very unlikely comparisons for a Hollywood film: Rohmer, Ozu, Olmi... By the time Rafelson's next film, *The King of Marvin Gardens*, came out in 1973 we had a little light thrown on Rafelson's origins. He was, it appeared, partner with Bert Schneider in BBS Productions, the company that had given us *Easy Rider*, *The Last Picture Show* and *Drive, He Said*, among others. And he had made one feature before *Five Easy Pieces* which had hardly been shown in America and not at all outside: it was called *Head* and it starred the Monkees, a pseudo-Beatle group spawned by television, which sounded odd for a start. More to the point, *The King of Marvin Gardens* confirmed that the comparisons provoked by *Five Easy Pieces* were by no means arbitrary flights of critical pretentiousness; they all held good for this new film too, and what had seemed a welcome but isolated oddity began to look like the individual style and approach of an artist.

Another three years went by before we could see another Bob Rafelson film. *Stay Hungry* is unlike the director's previous films in that it is based on a pre-existing novel, and quite a successful one at that, by Charles Gaines. But in almost every other way it is remarkably consistent in theme and style with the two preceding films. All three of them, for instance, deal with men in retreat, in one way or another, from a highly civilised, perhaps even a debilitatingly over-cultivated background. The red-neck hero of *Five Easy Pieces* is a pianist who has deliberately blotted out of his life the whole of his intellectual family origins and training. The brothers in *Marvin Gardens* find different-seeming ways of escape which are finally one and the same, the timid intellectual disc jockey living in a world of fantasy no less completely than his ebullient speculator brother, who has chosen to live in action rather than thought. The hero of *Stay Hungry* has features in common with both the Jack Nicholson character in *Five Easy Pieces* and the Bruce Dern character in *The King of Marvin Gardens*. The sudden death of his parents has left him apparently well off and in possession of a stately Southern home; but he chooses to blot this out, camping out in his own house and spending his time first with a group of very unappetising property sharks and then with the simple, basic denizens of a run-down gym he is supposed to take over for his associates at a knockdown price. To make the pattern complete, in the end he closes down the mansion and goes off to the mindless, tasteless life of a Winnebago mobile home and the wonderful world of Polyester.

Another thing that the hero of *Stay Hungry* has in common with earlier Rafelson characters is that he consorts only with girls a lot dumber and less classy than he is. The childlike country-and-western freak played by Karen Black in *Five Easy Pieces* obviously offers to her man the same kind of undemanding comfort tinged with exasperation that Ellen Burstyn and Julia Anne Robinson do to Bruce Dern in *Marvin Gardens* and that Sally Field does to Jeff Bridges in *Stay Hungry*. Whether this pattern of relationships witnesses some sort of qualified misogyny, or doubts about the possibility of real communication among human beings at all, or a romantic dream of the sexes coming together on the most basic animal level, it would be difficult to say. And not for that matter very important: the fact is that in Rafelson's films, whether from original screenplays or adaptations, the theme is clearly there.

Stylistically there are, as one would expect, some developments from film to film. In particular, *Stay Hungry* is shot in a noticeably looser and more mobile fashion than *Five Easy Pieces* and *The King of Marvin Gardens*, which have an almost Ozu-like economy of camera movement, particularly on exteriors; and the new film's range of mood and gesture is obviously wider. But even here it does not strike one as a radical departure, and indeed the sobriety of the last three films is the most surprising thing about them in relation to Rafelson's starting-point with *Head*. For *Head* is the absolute opposite, a film built upon lightning changes of mood and tone, articulated through a very flashy editing technique with a great deal



of whirling, wayward hand-held camera movement. Bearing in mind Rafelson's immediately previous experience and the presumed exploitability of the Monkees, one might of course guess that *Head* was a solitary aberration, a way of getting into theatrical film-making and nearer to the sort of film he really wanted to make. But this, it turns out, is far from the truth,

To understand how and why, and how Rafelson's films fit together, it is probably necessary to back-track a little and look at his beginnings and early career, which he described to me in Hollywood when just back from a gruelling tour of campus previews for *Stay Hungry*. His background, like that of many film men of his generation, is in television. But even here it is

Above: Jack Nicholson in 'Five Easy Pieces'; below: 'Head'



rather unusual. His earliest connection with show business was writing a play which won a prize and was staged with modest success while he was still at university. Immediately after this he went into the service, and found himself in Japan working at a military radio station as a disc jockey, very much like the Jack Nicholson character in *Marvin Gardens*, talking more or less at random far into the night. At the same time he was working on the side as a translator of Japanese films and adviser to Shochiku on what films they should and should not export to America. In this latter capacity he stamped, he says, on the chances of several Ozu films, which he loved himself but which he could not quite see finding an audience in America at that time, years before the revelation of *Tokyo Story*.

Released at last from the military, Rafelson toyed with the idea of doing his master's degree in philosophy at Benares University, but decided instead to go back to New York and capitalise on his experience in radio, which he did, for CBS. At the age of 22, brushing aside a lucrative job in advertising for Columbia Pictures, he became instead reader and story-editor for David Susskind's television Play of the Week, two-and-a-half hour adaptations of important plays, classic and contemporary, which went out on tape and were produced on a back-breaking schedule of twelve days' rehearsal and two days' shooting each. It would seem to have been, at least, an educative experience: he recalls reading more than a thousand plays in the first year, and writing additional dialogue for Shakespeare, Anouilh, Giraudoux and whoever else seemed to require it, all triumphantly undetected by critics who praised the series for the rigorous purity of its texts.

Rafelson's flirtations with the movies—or, more correctly, the movies' flirtations with him—began around this time. For five consecutive years he was shipped out to Hollywood, shown around, and failed to bite. Finally he went to Universal as an associate producer, but did not last very long; he ended up being escorted from the lot after an outburst in which he over-turned Lew Wasserman's desk in defence of a script which he felt was being violated. When he went back to pick up his things, Mr. Wasserman himself walked him to the gate and gave him a fatherly talking-to. 'I don't care,' he said, 'if you're Buñuel, if you're Kurosawa, if you're Fellini, John Ford' (thereby ingeniously encapsulating Rafelson's pantheon at that time), 'you'll find some day that film is a very collaborative process. When you learn this lesson, you'll come back and ask me for a job.' Rafelson did learn the lesson, in a way ('I have a double standard about this: while I think it applies to me that I should be left alone, I don't think it necessarily applies to those who work with me'), but he never went back asking for a job. Instead, he had his hands full with the Monkees.

RAFELSON: 'I put the Monkees together. There was a lot of music in my background—I'd played with a band in Mexico and other things—and I had this idea before I went to Universal. But it wasn't until the Beatles became popular that anyone would

agree to let a series like this go on the air. It became an enormously popular show, and the Monkees sold millions of records. And these were boys who had had little acting experience, if any, so the whole show was created in effect in the editing room. The tempo was of paramount importance—the programmes were very fast-moving with a lot of musical numbers, and I had to direct one or two of the shows for television to set the pattern of how these things should be made. The average number of set-ups for a television show would be 20 to 25 a day. I brought the production crew together and said, 'Look, we will not travel the customary teamster vans and all the equipment—we'll do this on the run.' The first day that I shot I made 125 set-ups. I said, 'Don't light the background, nobody will see it on the tube anyway.' Most cameramen were used to seeing their dailies in a screening room, as for a movie, but obviously the only way you could properly evaluate the work was by how it would be seen on a television screen. So we just didn't light anything, and once that was established as a concept we could travel much faster.

This was the first joint effort of Bert Schneider and myself, when we formed this company that subsequently got into *Easy Rider* and *Head* and *The Last Picture Show*. And of the first thirty-two shows, twenty-nine were directed by people who had never directed before—including me. So the idea of using new directors not perhaps too encumbered by traditional ways of thinking was initiated on that series, and just continued in the movies we made later. *Head* might seem like a natural offshoot of the television series, but it wasn't really. It was natural in the sense that after the success of the Monkees one could imagine making capital of that. But *Head* was never thought of by me or my partner as a picture that would make money. What I felt was that we were entitled, since we had made for Columbia an enormous amount of money in their record division and in television sales, to make a picture that would in a sense expose the process.

Head was assumed to be an exploitation film, but in fact it was not that at all. It opened metaphorically with the Monkees committing suicide, it was a complete exposure of my relationship to the Monkees. It made no money, coming out some time after the Monkees' popularity had begun to decline; hardly anyone saw it, and those who did were mostly mystified by it. Since then it has become something of a cult film on campus and in France. Henri Langlois sent me a piece in which he said it was one of his favourite American movies. Now possibly this was because I had given him a carpet-sweeper for the Cinémathèque, but he is not the only French critic who has come out with extraordinary analyses.

Of course *Head* is an utterly and totally fragmented film. Among other reasons for making it was that I thought I would never get to make another movie, so I might as well make fifty to start out with and put them all in the same feature. In that I was in a sense emulating or satirising the styles of various American pictures. There's a *Golden Boy* episode, a desert episode, a harem dance number; the French immediately picked up the scene where Davy Jones



Ellen Burstyn, Bruce Dern, Jack Nicholson in 'The King of Marvin Gardens'

dances in white on a black set and in black on a white set, and I intercut the two, as being a tribute to Vincente Minnelli. They've traced every one of these things, sometimes incorrectly and certainly without being aided and abetted by my original purposes at all. But none the less there was this kind of history of the American movies in there as well. One of the curious things is that the Beatles and the Stones and other rock groups regard *Head* as being a minor triumph, because it's the story of their lives as well—of the manipulation of rock stars. After all, the Monkees wind up playing dandruff in Victor Mature's hair, which was my way of suggesting that this was all one giant hype—which the Monkees in fact were—and of revealing it to the public. And they all recognise this as their own story.

Head was my first collaboration with Jack Nicholson. Jack had abandoned his career as an actor at this point—I didn't even know him as an actor—and we wrote and produced this picture together. When we were writing it Jack would act out all the parts, as would I, and my eyes were just glued to the expressions on his face and the intensity he brought to the performance in a script conference. I told him that the next time I made a picture he had to be in it. Meanwhile I persuaded Dennis Hopper that Jack might be right for the role in *Easy Rider*, and then the idea of *Five Easy Pieces* came up. No film that I have directed, with the exception of *Stay Hungry*, started with material outside myself. Before *Five Easy Pieces* I had written three versions of a film, partial scripts you might say, taking place in totally different locations but always dealing with the same problems of much the same central character, who ultimately became the Nicholson character in *Five Easy Pieces*. When I felt that I couldn't go any further with the screenplays, I took all this work to Carol Eastman—Adrien Joyce

—and said, 'Look, I'm really in trouble. I know how I feel about the central character, I know the sort of attitude I want to convey, but I don't think I've succeeded with these screenplays. Would you read them and talk with me?'

She did, she knew Jack as well, we met, we had two or three discussions. I was also able to infiltrate into the discussion various interests I had, in music for instance, until we shaped a story together. Four or five days after that I started to cast, and we literally shot that movie ten weeks after the initial story conversation. While she was writing I was picking locations, including spending three weeks working in the oilfields myself, so you can imagine the tremendous energy released, after a year and a half I had spent only working on screenplays for Jack and not getting anywhere. The only scene of mine that Carol really used in its entirety was the scene with Jack at the luncheon counter—'no substitutions'—and there she added the ultimate flourish of Jack wiping the table clean. What I was really drawn to obviously was studying that character; but for every character in a movie, I like to think of how that character would behave in another movie, or in his own movie. My interest is not totally involved in the principals, but in every small character as well.

Other people have thought it strange, but I don't find it strange at all, that the style of *Five Easy Pieces* is so different from that of *Head*. I really think the camerawork, like every other aspect of the technology available to the director, must be dictated by the ambience of the movie, and that you don't legislate these things ahead of time. You have a feeling for what the movie is, and then that dictates how you use sound, how you use the camera. I find I compose right to the hairline in every movie I make. In *Five Easy Pieces* and *The King of Marvin Gardens* the style was such that in the exteriors the camera was, with maybe one or two exceptions, totally static the whole time, much the

way that Ozu is totally static in many of his films. When I first set up this pattern of non-movement on exteriors, it was for a very specific reason, though such reasons tend to dissipate as you look backwards and it comes to seem just a stylistic flourish.

I had a concept about rearranging geography. In these two films I am talking about exteriors only, because I did move the camera on the interiors. To give you a specific example, in *Five Easy Pieces* there is a scene between Nicholson and Billy Green Bush in which Billy Green argues with him about whether it's right for him to get Rhea pregnant. The scene takes place out in the oilfields. I would make the shot of Nicholson, and in the background there were thirty or forty wells, to suggest the clutter of his mind, the confusion of it. I don't mean to be heavy-handed about these things, but it was just a way of framing the shot to put a lot of machinery there. And when I came to do Billy Green Bush I went two miles away, and used just one piece of machinery, and kept a complete blank field behind him, which reflected the character's open temperament, and the simplicity of what he had to say. I did this sort of thing constantly throughout the picture, and a cameraman is not normally used to this—especially Laszlo Kovacs. This was his first union picture, he was used to doing a lot of pyrotechnics with the camera and was very mistrustful: was this going to be a boring movie? Of course, by the time I got to *Marvin Gardens* the point had been proven that I was doing this specifically and knew how I planned on editing the shots together, but here there was a certain amount of my having to restrain him from camera movement.

On *Marvin Gardens* we were constantly making one shot out towards the ocean, and another towards the façades of the buildings, and rearranging the geography of the beach and making it more suitable for the frame as opposed to the natural landscape. I did much less of this in *Stay Hungry*; as a matter of fact I had consciously to break my-

self of the habit, which I had come to think of as a conceit, and be much more flexible with my camera movement outdoors, since there was going to be much more action in the film. Now the difference between doing a pan shot where the camera is moving and doing it in cuts is that the camera embraces all the geography in between the two opposing cuts, so that limits you much more to the given characteristics of the locale. Which may or may not be a good thing. In those two movies it was a stylistic gesture of which I have since broken myself. Though I do still try to restrain myself from moving the camera unless it is absolutely necessary and unless the camera action is at least subliminally motivated by the action of the characters.

The King of Marvin Gardens came about in much the same way as *Five Easy Pieces*. I do have a brother, and I felt that one of the relationships I was not able to explore at all in *Five Easy Pieces* was the one between the two brothers, and I wanted to. I started with the notion of doing a film about two brothers. I also had been a disc jockey in Japan, and had been in the habit of doing long free-form stories on the air, very much like the fishbone story with which Nicholson starts *Marvin Gardens*. And I felt that *Five Easy Pieces* had been very explicitly naturalistic, and I wanted to move in a sense one step back towards *Head*. I conceived the film as a sort of comical nightmare. It is much more fragmented in style than *Five Easy Pieces*. In *Head* scenes are constantly controverted or interpreted differently in the light of the scene that follows. The same is true to an extent of *Five Easy Pieces* but a great deal more of *Marvin Gardens*. Nicholson tells a story about how he conspired to kill his grandfather; after the credits, after a six-minute indulgence of this story, all in a head close-up, we meet the grandfather, find that he is very much alive and disapproves of the story he has just heard on the air that his grandson has told. There was this constant kind of labyrinthine approach.

Now the style of the film, the attitude of the film, were things I was feeling at the time and trying to come to grips with in my life. The world was very despairing, everybody I knew was being assassinated or killed, and there was a general sense of instability all around me. Whether this was true, or simply true of my perception, I don't know, but it was the way I felt, and I wanted to put this up on the screen. I made contact with Jake Brackman, a critic who had not written a screenplay before, and initially we just started to talk about some of these things floating around in my mind. Ultimately, having written the story together, we emerged with his screenplay.

I must say that I can see some lines of continuity between the subjects of *Five Easy Pieces* and *The King of Marvin Gardens* and *Stay Hungry* by hindsight, and they have been pointed out to me often enough. But I have been absolutely unaware of them as I awkwardly fumbled towards the work. Shortly after *Marvin Gardens*, I hitch-hiked through the South. I hadn't been there since I was much, much younger—Peace Marches and that kind of thing—and I was very enamoured of this, to me, very exotic aspect of our culture. I had an initial craving at that time to do something in the South. Meantime I had done an enormous amount of research for a film about the slave trade: I had spent a year in British libraries and American universities, I'd travelled five thousand miles through West Africa, in fact living the life of many of the characters that I'd read about. At one point I found myself in Ghana, in a slave port, and I literally collapsed: I felt that the subject was too emotionally oppressive for me at that time. There had been tragedy in my own family, and I felt I wanted to turn to something more cheerful, to project a more exhilarating aspect of myself. I had just begun to think in those terms when a friend suggested I read this book by Charles Gaines, *Stay Hungry*.

I do have some intentions, incidentally, of coming back to the slavery subject. One of the pictures I wrote for *Five Easy Pieces* took place entirely on a train; the central character was a returning soldier from Vietnam, who was essentially the same as the Nicholson character in the finished film. I abandoned that project—it was one of the scripts I gave Carol Eastman—but the initial sequence of that script was the loading of a coffin on to a train. The sequence at the end of *Marvin Gardens* where Nicholson loads the coffin of his dead brother was an image which I had also talked about with Brackman, so that I never totally abandon images or motifs or ideas, they just infiltrate other movies. That whole picture became condensed in one shot. Just by the way, the work I had done on that picture was recently made by Henry Jaglom, starring Dennis Hopper, called *Tracks*—I haven't seen it yet. That was because Jaglom and I travelled thousands of miles on trains talking about the script.

With *Stay Hungry*, I wasn't in the least interested in making this book into a movie, but I was interested in the writer. So I met Gaines in Birmingham, Alabama, and it was only at the end of a very long conversation that I said to him that the conclusions of his novel were not unlike the

R. G. Armstrong, owner of the gym in 'Stay Hungry'



conclusions I had come to in both *Five Easy Pieces* and *The King of Marvin Gardens*. The novel ends on a very exasperated tone with the girl being killed and the character of the hero, Craig Blake, wandering somewhat nomadically, unaffected by the experiences he has gone through. Gaines wanted me to direct this movie even while I was suggesting substantially altering his book. There were a number of people competing for the movie rights, but it emerged that Gaines had really admired *Marvin Gardens* and said he wanted to work with me. He thought the experience might be more interesting than his attachments to the novel. I told him that it was also going to be more dangerous, since he would find his own temperament being somewhat violated, and if he did have these attachments and was unable to transcend them he was going to find himself affected by this picture.

We none the less agreed that there were other ways of dealing with the material: I would say that about one-third of the characters in the film are not in the book, and we created a whole subplot, including the uncle, including the family retainer William and so on, who were newly invented characters. I felt that rather than being redundant and trying to recapture the energies he had put into the novel, Gaines might be able to bring new life to a new creative experience based on the same basic body of material. If you can break the logic of the original piece of thinking and open it some, the quality of the writing becomes more energised. Otherwise you're merely trying to figure out, how can I translate the novel experience into the film experience? At any rate, I did not relent in my feelings about wanting to make a more optimistic film and express that aspect of myself. I only agreed to do *Stay Hungry* after I had spent six weeks travelling with body-builders, because I wasn't sure I was in the least intrigued by their profession. The day after the Mr. Olympia contest in New York was the day I had set as my deadline for notifying Gaines as to whether or not I would pursue the thing—and there was enough there, obviously, to make me decide I wanted to do it.

I guess it's a little odd that the downbeat ending of the novel, in which I saw the closest resemblance to my previous films, was the element I was most determined to change. But other unlikely confrontations take place. I suppose that in more conventional narrative structures the enemy in the film would have been the cartel members, and the fight would then have taken place openly between them and the hero, Craig Blake. Instead, they simply subvert the gym owner, and the big confrontation comes between those two. I don't do this kind of thing intentionally; it's more that I find the intentions of simple, straightforward narrative so compellingly and embarrassingly predictable in most instances that I tend to search out other possibilities. I don't mind looking at movies that are made in this way, but I find it very difficult myself to make movies where I know right from the beginning what the end is going to be.

There's nothing the matter with that. For example, in a classical form like the Western you usually know that the bad man and the good guy are going to have a stand-

off at some point in the film, and indeed would be vastly disappointed if this were not the case. If I were making a genre film, I would not perhaps betray the genre in the way that I have circumnavigated these conventions in the films I have made. In fact I would like to try it some time, and trust that I would bring something unique just in the direction of the film, without thinking that I had to have a unique screenplay—and by unique I mean emanating solely from myself. I think I've been more unnecessarily terrified about such a prospect than I should be, and thinking about what I should do next I don't know that I'll take three years between films as I have done with the last two. I feel that I'd probably like to work faster and direct something that is totally outside myself. I rather look forward to the challenge of being ordinary.

But in the movies I have made so far, the greatest reward has been that they have yielded to me privileges of experimentation and exploration. I don't like to know what my movies are about, and I don't like to know how they are going to end: it's a constant puzzlement and a challenge. In fact, in *Marvin Gardens*, *Five Easy Pieces* and *Stay Hungry* I did not know how the movies were going to end until the day before I ended them—a process which is quite exasperating for my collaborators, particularly in the production department, who are constantly receiving new pages at the last moment, sometimes to be shot in locales thousands of miles away from where they are. In *Five Easy Pieces* the ending of the picture was scripted entirely differently; on *Marvin Gardens* the same thing was true. I shoot in continuity, and I pay very close attention to what the characters in the movie are telling me, rather than being myself this dictatorial force telling the characters how they should respond.

I place a great deal of faith in the collaboration of the entire company, and in the atmosphere in which I am shooting. I try to remain susceptible to what the characters are telling me, what the weather is telling me, what the sounds around me are telling me... While I do enormous amounts of preparation, I go through a strange emptying process before I go to the stage, and try to evaporate all the preconceived notions I have about how the day's work is going to be. I try to stay vulnerable. This also accounts, I think, for a certain amount of confusion on the part of the audiences that see my movies; they find them disorienting, problematic and difficult to follow, illogical if you will. My films seem totally logical to me, but I am pursuing a psycho-logic as opposed to a kind of narrative, dramatic logic which has been passed on from one generation to another, has been the rules by which we should be structuring our art.

People come into a theatre, and there's a black screen, and suddenly a head swivels into it, embarks on a very long story with no revelation as to where we are, whom Nicholson is speaking to, what the physical geography is; there's no movement, just the long, long story prior to the credits—that's already opposing the conventions of how a film begins, and it makes people restless. Well, the subject of *Marvin Gardens* basically was instability, a clue

to be derived from the name of the brothers, which is Stable (Staebler), and I tried to find a way of rendering instability in the form of the movie, so that things were happening in unexpected terms, and in controversion of expectations, because that movie was about unstable lives, unpredictable lives. And I suspect that most people's lives are lived in that fashion, but that when they turn to their fictional enjoyments they want to feel that neatness and predictability exist somewhere, especially if not in their own lives.

Stay Hungry, again, does begin on an incredibly solemn note: a boy riding through the forest and sitting alone, a letter voice-over introducing us to the problems of his life, the despair of his life. And immediately, snap, we're dealing with the wild flourishes of middle-class Birmingham businessmen talking on CB units, and when he goes on the first visit to the gym we're into a weirdly comical atmosphere. The film constantly, almost manically, shifts from one mood to the next. It does take on totally unexpected confrontations, there's a sudden explosion of comic energy when the body-builders go racing through the streets of Birmingham, but these things are I hope anticipated, so that they don't just happen arbitrarily or as radical stylistic departures.

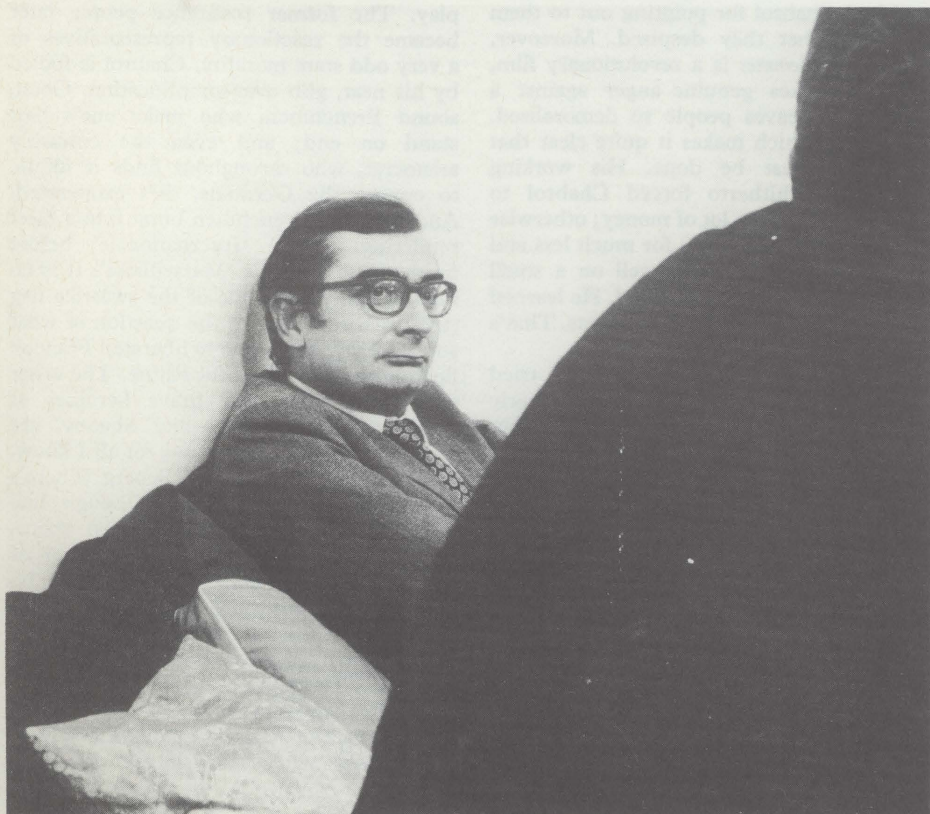
There's a character who invents his own language, who takes us to the edge of farce and becomes the communicator of the bedlam that's going on between the gym and the auditorium; there is that kind of challenge to see what would happen if the Martians landed, so to speak. This is not unlike, I suspect, the way people's lives are lived all the time: we are despairing and ecstatic in various degrees from moment to moment and day to day. So I tried to put that kind of energy into the movie. But this all makes my work somewhat abrasive to a movie audience, and it's one of the consequences that I have to suffer if I'm going to continue to work in this form, which I don't necessarily anticipate doing for the rest of my life.'

Meanwhile, however, Rafelson seems to be as obsessed with the need to continue as anyone in Hollywood, and to be committed in spite of himself to the slow, painful exploration of his own psyche in terms of film subjects which are at least viable by commercial standards. The four films he has made to date demonstrate a remarkably consistent vision and angle of approach. Stay Hungry, as much as any of the others, comes out finally as an unmistakable Rafelson film, beautifully shaped and astonishingly well acted (Sally Field, hitherto known mainly as the Flying Nun, is stunning as the hero's girl friend, and real-life muscle man Arnold Schwarzenegger is quite charming as the gentle, dedicated body-builder), a compelling product of that highly literate, tradition-based culture that Rafelson's heroes all determinedly reject. There is a paradox here, but out of the apparent contradictions—contradictions in Rafelson's own mind presumably as much as in his principal characters—come some of the most personal, assured films of the last eight years, films which are specifically American for all the European parallels they have evoked. ■



Insects in a Glass case

Random thoughts on CLAUDE CHABROL
by RAINER WERNER FASSBINDER



It isn't often that one leading film-maker expresses himself freely in print about another. Fassbinder on Chabrol perhaps reveals at least as much about the writer as it does about the subject—but Chabrol is certainly stalwart enough to stand up to a few knocks, and it would be even more fascinating if he could be tempted into a return match. This article first appeared in the book *Reihe Film 5: Claude Chabrol*, edited by Peter W. Jansen and Wolfram Schütte, ©1975 by Carl Hanser Verlag, Munich, to whom we are grateful for permission to reprint. The translation from German is by Derek Prouse.

'Every debt must be paid on this earth, even that of showing shadows or half-shadows as human beings.'—THEODOR FONTANE

It continues as it began. And up to now it hasn't changed. When François goes to Sargent, his birthplace which he hasn't visited for ages, Maria gives him a searching look and says something to the effect that he is looking at all the people in the place as if they were insects. That was in *Le Beau Serge* in 1957. And Chabrol, who identifies himself with François, lied by ending the film with this crystallisation. But Chabrol has not crystallised himself. On the contrary. Otherwise, in his later works, he would have developed more creatively François' perception at the end of *Le Beau Serge* that one must lend a helping hand. And thereby—honourably—he would probably have become a great film-maker. Now, with hindsight, the end of *Le Beau Serge* stands out as an artificially imposed, constipated Christian attitude. And Chabrol has not become a great film-maker—even though he has made many beautiful and successful films and even a few great ones.

Chabrol's viewpoint is not that of the entomologist, as is often claimed, but that of a child who keeps a collection of insects in a glass case and observes with alternating amazement, fear and delight the marvellous behaviour patterns of his tiny creatures. According to his state of mind—it might have something to do with sleeping badly or eating a bad meal—he changes his attitude to his animals. His standpoint, in fact, varies. He doesn't investigate. Otherwise he could, and must, discover grounds for the brutality of existence and have more to say about it. Apart from the fact that there has to be a number of creatures who are less colourful than the others, less iridescent, in fact an overwhelming majority of colourless little creatures who provide the basis for the existence of the more beautiful ones. These, however, the child disregards; he does not investigate but merely glances at them, dazzled as he is by the glittering, strange ones. This prevents him from grasping the drawbacks of his preferred creatures. The child becomes blinder and blinder, and angry and despondent about

Above: Fassbinder in 'Fox and his Friends'. Left: Claude Chabrol. Photograph: Nicoletta Zalaffi

his blindness, for the curious inadequacy already gives the child an inkling that one day, with his little animals, he will make a film that will be called NADA: nothing.

Once again it is fate that strikes, an accident enlisted to drive the story forward. Why does Paul shoot his cousin Charles [in *Les Cousins*]? Well, that's fate. And a pretty casual fate at that. There could have been plenty of others: the bullet could have killed Paul, fired on by Charles in the night. At least the story's idiocy would have been interrupted. But the idiocy, which is really stupidity, is consistently maintained to the end. And what is the most important aspect of consistent stupidity? The consistency or the stupidity? Whatever it be, the plot gets right to the heart of the kind of dim-witted spectator that one despises. What was the real face of Fascism in France in 1958? *Les Cousins* is a document of the times without time and without documentary value. Fascism in 1958 in France can't be Wagner and tormenting a Jew with 'Gestapo' shouts. True, a coloured student is twice harangued as stupid; it's courageous of Chabrol to have shown that. But what about the hundred thousand North Africans who were exploited and discriminated against in Paris? Ah yes, but you can't upbraid someone for what he hasn't done . . . or can you? It seems to me that with Chabrol, it is the things that aren't there that are the important ones.

Still, there is the constant hate between Thérèse and Henri Marcoux. Hate has endured after a lengthy marriage in *A Double Tour*. That is already something. More, in any case, than Paul's silent contempt for Charles in *Les Cousins*, which doesn't 'in the long run merge into another, this time collective aberration: Fascism' (*Cahiers du Cinéma*, 1960). Fascism involves rather more, God help us, than the contempt of a clever young man for his tearful cousin. So the hatred in *A Double Tour*, the marriage which destroys people because it is fundamentally inhuman, the children's upbringing in the marriage and how these children must inevitably turn out—now, that would be a theme. Even as a fairy-tale, films mustn't aspire to reality. But what about lies? Chabrol is right: with a small section of society (like the *haute bourgeoisie*) to which there is almost no access, you can freely deal in lies. Or doesn't the spectator have the possibility of re-interpreting the lies in terms of his own reality? Hasn't it all still got something to do with the marriage of our parents? The hypocrisy and the claims of ownership? But the fact that our parents make these claims is not their fault but the fault of their upbringing and the reasons why they were brought up in this fashion, etc. . . .

Chabrol doesn't see it this way. Chabrol asks no questions, as his later films show; he advocates marriage. And marriage is first and foremost an establishment institution. Chabrol is opposed to the hypocrisy in marriage, opposed to the claims of ownership instead of being against marriage in itself. It is all cheap, both the feelings and the needs. No questions about the real needs and the real feelings. No indication that the needs one thinks one has are really only those expected of one.

In itself, everything seems to be in order. The disorders that arise for Chabrol are

irrational, not inevitable deviations as they actually must be in such a system of society. Richard Marcoux (in *A Double Tour*), a badly brought-up son and murderer, does not become a murderer because of his upbringing but because he is weak-minded. And that is Chabrol's lie, a lie which prevents the spectator from taking the fairy-tale for reality. Then what's a film for? Just to make money? Well, after all, the film industry is an industry. Making money is an honourable motive, certainly, but is it the only one? And then, aren't such films dangerous because they take away courage instead of giving it, blinker instead of enlightening? After all, it's only Art and what can Art do? Maybe . . .

Chabrol must have become aware of the blind alley he'd landed in with *A Double Tour* and from which he was to extricate himself so perfectly later—when he made *Les Bonnes Femmes*. And had trouble with it. *Les Bonnes Femmes* is the only Chabrol film which deals almost entirely with real people and not shadows. At last Chabrol reveals a trace of tenderness for his characters—a tenderness later only manifested towards isolated characters, such as the ones played by Michel Bouquet. Here, he enters with his characters into the most hateful and repugnant situations but he stays with them; the child has put his hand inside the glass case with the insects. Naturally he gets bitten. Thereafter, he won't be so quick to put his hand inside to deliver his creatures. At any rate, he hasn't done so up to date. True, he has fished out some particularly glittering insects and cautiously stroked them. But he's gone no further.

The critics gave him a ferocious hammering and the public followed the critics' lead. This, despite the remarkable fact that the critics apparently for once approved the characters Chabrol really loved. I think that in reality they, the critics and the public, despised 'the good women' and punished Chabrol for pointing out to them how and what they despised. Moreover, *Les Bonnes Femmes* is a revolutionary film, for it provokes genuine anger against a system that leaves people so demoralised. It is a film which makes it quite clear that something must be done. His working method had hitherto forced Chabrol to make films costing a lot of money; otherwise he could have made films for much less and learned to work perfectly well on a small budget. The opposite happened. He learned to make slovenly films on big budgets. That's one way.

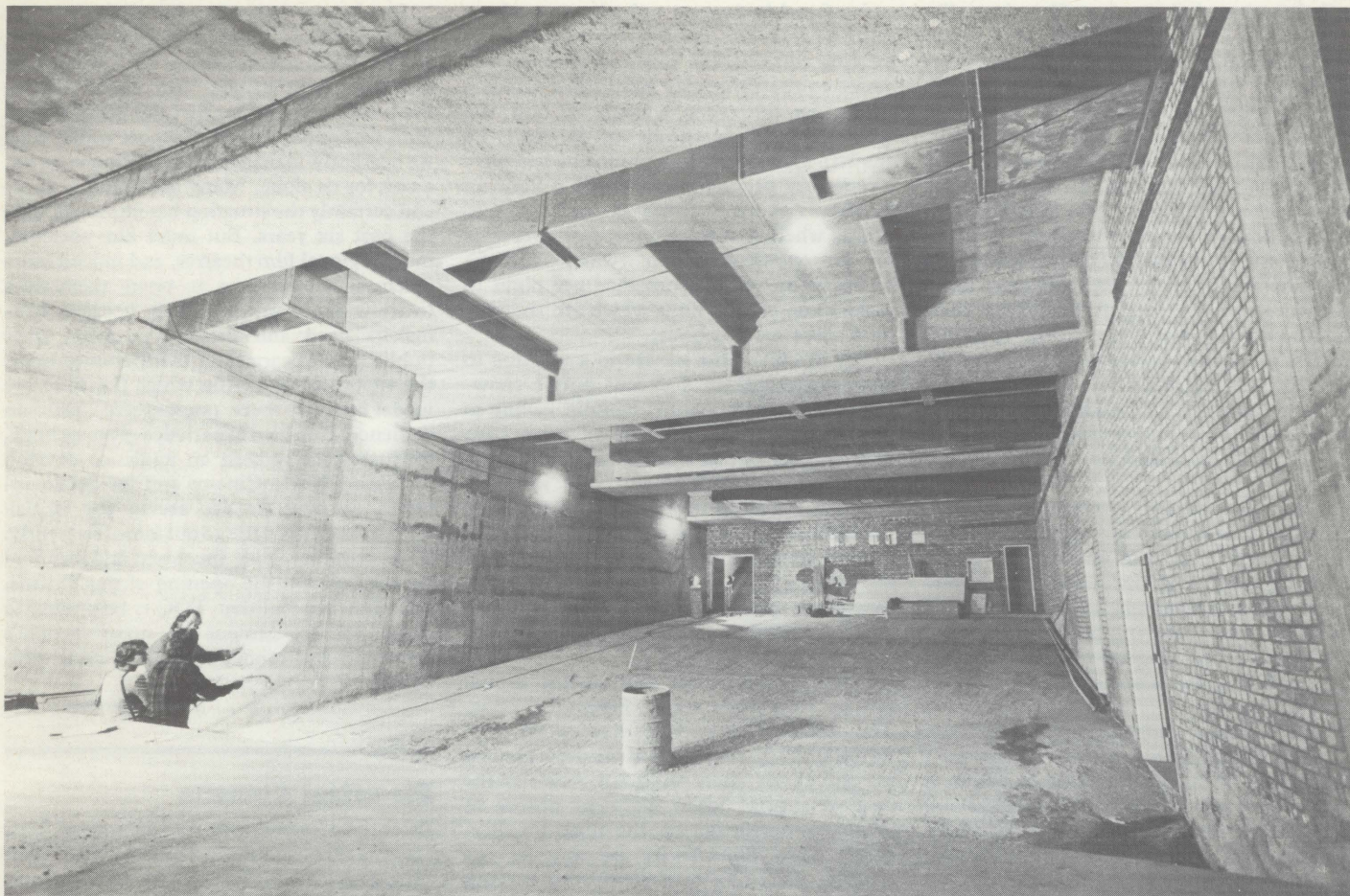
After *Les Bonnes Femmes*, Chabrol tried making B-pictures, which were clearly characterised by too little action and rather too much art. The public, in the main, didn't care for *Les Godelureaux*, *L'Oeil du Malin*, *Ophélie* and *Landru*. Of this second period of his work I know only *Landru*—a remarkable monster of a film. Newsreel extracts from the First World War are juxtaposed with theatrical tableaux; Landru himself, in this account of the story, is shown not as a monster but as someone who, living in a cruel time, behaves cruelly—and Chabrol allows Charles Denner to play so extravagantly that the story loses its credibility. It contradicts itself so much that, by the end, one has seen nothing, experienced nothing. The audience knows how the joke

is going to develop, and it does so through Chabrol's delight in loathsomeness, which he indulges to a point of a delight in mania. A mania that bores one, and bores one to the point of making the film itself boring—for the film is nothing more than its surface: the film and its mostly beautiful images which in themselves become jarring. This could mean that, this time, Chabrol had grasped that the public was his enemy; and, after all, why should one do good to one's enemies?

Between 1957 and 1962 Chabrol managed to make at least one and sometimes two features a year. In 1963, he made only an 18-minute sketch, so that in the following third period one must make it clear that Chabrol needed to earn money. But that's only partly the case. In the two 'Tiger' films he made—I should call them detective films on the side of the establishment—there is a consistency of approach: no attempt was made to come to grips with the genre. For that kind of work Terence Young is more accomplished. Chabrol even has some trouble with his imitation: everything is a bit underestimated—even the joke element that one finds in this kind of film. What is left is the agreement between Chabrol and his Republic.

In Chabrol, France has no critic, no twentieth-century Balzac (the role in which these films indicate he would like to see himself); but France does have an embryo cynic in Chabrol, a cynic with enormous nostalgia for the naïve, for lost identity. And from this remarkable juxtaposition spring films like *Marie Chantal contre Dr. Kha*, *La Ligne de Démarcation* and *La Route de Corinthe*. Apparently naïve films with naïve heroes. That is tolerable with the detective films, *Marie Chantal* and *La Route de Corinthe*, because the detective film is a naïve genre, but it becomes farcical when it aspires to reality as in *La Ligne de Démarcation*. It was no accident that Chabrol called in Colonel Rémy to write the screenplay. The former resistance people later became the reactionary representatives of a very odd state morality. Chabrol is fooled by his neat, glib over-simplification. Good, sound Frenchmen, who make one's hair stand on end; and even the cowardly aristocrat, who throughout finds it idiotic to oppose the Germans, dies exonerated. And the good Frenchmen burst into a brief rendering of the 'Internationale' before finishing up with the 'Marseillaise'. It is no help to tack on a wave of the swastika flag (the usual rejoinder to the question of what subsequently happened to liberated France), floating down a beautiful Rhine. The other two films, with their brave heroines of fortune, Marie Chantal and Shanny, are very attractive—as attractive, for all I know, as Marie Laforet and Jean Seberg. There's not much more to them—although one might get bogged down in deep metaphysical speculations about what kind of message Chabrol had in mind when he saddles the *petite bourgeoise*, Chantal, with power over the whole of mankind. All power to the *petite bourgeoisie*, or something similar? Who knows?

Chabrol wasn't able to set up the subsequent saga of Marie Chantal. Luckily. I can't really believe his sincere assurance



The Other Cinema: building from the ground up. Photograph: Mike Wells

Other and Essential

A survey of independent distributors/exhibitors

In October, The Other Cinema, distributors in Britain of Godard and Wiseman and Third World films, open their new cinema on the site of the old Scala in Charlotte Street; Derek Hill, veteran of the Short Film Service and the New Cinema Club, a few months ago launched his Essential Cinema in Wardour Street; and Contemporary Films, one of the veterans of independent distribution in Britain, earlier this year celebrated their 25th birthday with a National Film Theatre season.

In this feature, we have asked some independent distributors/exhibitors to comment on their policies, problems and view of the present situation. We sent them not a questionnaire but some suggestions of areas to cover (how are films chosen? are audiences changing in character? are critics helpful? what is their contact with an audience?, etc.). George Hoellering and Ivo Jarosy of the Academy, doyen among London's specialised cinemas, have answered succinctly along these suggested lines; Antony Balch, highly individual director and distributor (from *Freaks* and *Traitement de Choc* to his own *Horror Hospital*) ranges over the route that brought him into distribution. Other contributors are Nick Hart-Williams (The Other Cinema), Derek Hill (Essential) and Charles and Kitty Cooper (Contemporary). We would like to have included a report from David and Barbara Stone, of Cinegate and the Gate Cinema, but they felt, unhappily, that their relatively short experience of the British scene disqualified them. In any case, the intention of this survey is to be representative rather than comprehensive.

The Other Cinema

Film is usually seen—by the industry, the critics and the public—as 'entertainment' or 'art'. It is a 'product' with one of these labels attached—and it is marketed as any other product would be (though in this country with considerably less imagination). The very scale of the technology and real estate involved has resulted in a concentration of power in the hands of a few major companies, controlling the distribution and exhibition of this 'product'.

What I take the word 'independent' to signify is an existence outside (if often on the edge of) this system. A parallel framework has been established, largely on the basis of the much lower cost of 16mm film stock, film-making equipment and projectors. Individuals and groups have acquired access to the medium of cinema, without having to work to the criteria of the industry. Indeed, most cinemas are not even equipped to show 16mm—and even when, for better image quality, independents work in 35mm, they rarely find the industry in tune with their ideas.

In 1969, a move began in Britain to establish an 'alternative' film distribution. It was one aspect of an upsurge in media activity on the left—spurred in part by such events as May '68 and the Vietnam War. When The Other Cinema finally began in 1970 it was on a much smaller scale than originally envisaged (there had been talk, not for the first time, of a new, or 'third' circuit). It started with a staff of two, several hundred pounds (donated) and two films—Godard's *Le Gai Savoir* and Peter Whitehead's *The Fall*. The intention was

to bring more independent films into distribution in Britain, to locate the audience for them and to build a distribution base. These are all on-going processes; nor is TOC working alone on any of them. But the point of this exercise is briefly to analyse our approach to the task, rather than to look for specific achievements. We see ourselves as somewhat distinct from the film industry; and in nearly all cases we are working directly with film-makers (rather than agents or producers) who, by virtue of their independence, have the right to choose their distributor. For many, the choice is a final expression of their intentions in making the film. Broadly speaking one could say that we share an interest in communication and change—in social and political institutions, in personal relationships, in perception itself.

Often this shared concern is labelled 'political', and in the best and broadest sense of the word it is. But just as the labels 'entertainment' and 'art' seem to predetermine certain responses, so does the label 'political'. Hence the use of the word 'independent'—which suggests not only financial independence, but also the questioning of accepted values.

The potential audience for independent cinema is heterogeneous. The problem in reaching it is to find locations in which it can come together. Since most cinemas and film societies still adhere to the entertainment and art criteria—and to the traditional genres contained within them—we have had to build our base elsewhere. Not surprisingly, our support has come from universities and colleges; from their unions, their film and political societies and from the teachers of film, history, psychology, etc. Both on campus and off there are groups who use film in their work: women's and men's liberation groups, black groups, campaigns such as Chile Solidarity, community organisations, environmental groups, and so on.

This then has become our base, constituted largely of active socialists. The complaint that is often justifiably aired is some variant of the 'preaching to the converted' cliché. But of course it's nowhere near as simple as that—and if you like, the establishment has for decades used the cinema to preach to its converts. Independent cinema is a long overdue move towards balancing the availability of ideas and information. One of the most important tasks is to take independent film to the general public—which means having 'independent cinemas'. There are already a few; in particular the Birmingham Arts Lab, the Arncliffe in Bristol, some of the regional film theatres (others are quite traditional) and soon our own cinema in London.

Which is not to say that there are no other independent cinemas in the capital (though certainly there are precious few for so large a city). One of the most encouraging signs of recent years has been the opening in London of such cinemas as the Electric, the Gate, the Screen on the Green, the ICA, the Phoenix, and most recently, Derek Hill's Essential. But here again TOC is taking a different tack—trying to provide a context in which independent films can survive, and in which there can be some discussion of the films, of the issues they raise and of the medium. One of the concrete problems

we've faced is that not only do most of our films not fit the criteria for selection by existing cinemas, but many of them are not suited to the seven-day run (under which a film must be strong enough to bear the cinema's total overheads or it can't be shown). Consequently, our cinema will have a repertory programme in which a film can be shown as many times as seems appropriate, whether that be once, five times, or for an open-ended run (which will be restricted to one performance per night to make room for the films which are showing on a more limited basis).

For the first time we are in a position to ensure film-makers a decent public showing in London, hopefully without having to rely on the critics, who in all cases have limited space (when will editors give cinema the space it deserves, and gets in other countries?) and in many cases limited taste. Even those critics who support independent cinema would, I'm sure, prefer not to be in the position of determining a film's fate, as they often are in situations where one film bears the full financial burden.

Generally, in fact, the new cinema should put us on a more secure financial footing. Too much of our energies have so far been devoted to the struggle for survival. Having no capital, we often could not even risk the cost of a print when we were unsure of where we could screen the film. Furthermore, many film-makers are wary of entrusting their film to a distributor without a London outlet. But happily we are now moving into a situation of having more good films to choose from than we can manage to take on.

The selection procedure at TOC is unusual in that all the staff are involved. TOC operates as a collective (currently of 6). Wages are equal, and though we each have defined roles, major policy decisions are taken together. Chief among these is that of what we distribute. Where possible, we all see a film; when a print can't be brought to England, those who have seen it abroad must convince the others of the reasons for distributing it. Thus six minds are brought to what is (and should be) a complex evaluation process.

Films are seen at festivals, or brought or sent to us by the makers. There are distribution groups similar to TOC in Germany, Sweden, Holland, Belgium, Canada and America—as well as many like-minded groups and individuals concerned with film in other countries. This growing network generates an ever increasing flow of information.

The selection of films is never based on financial criteria (TOC is non-profit), nor even on an estimate of 'audience potential'. In the short term, though, such considerations might force us to wait a while until we can afford a print. Generally speaking, we are never in a position to pay advances (on royalties). Usually the reason film-makers seek an advance is that, broadly speaking, they don't trust distributors. In a business that reeks of arcane and corrupt practices, distribution is at the bottom of the heap. Thus one only has to run a reasonably efficient and honest organisation and people flock to you. Also, being a socialist organisation in a capitalist industry has its advantages (as well as its contradictions).

One hopes that, whatever else comes out of independent distribution and exhibition, it will be a strengthening of independent film-making in Britain. Our major task for the future is to ensure that the many British films we handle are seen far more widely than we currently manage. This, of course, is not a task for us alone. Many are involved in it, and certainly the situation has improved over the past six years. But more film societies, more regional film theatres, and indeed more cinemas, should take it upon themselves to show this work, not only because film-makers need and deserve to reach their public (and to earn their living) but to break the vicious circle within which few films are made because there (supposedly) isn't an audience. Our own experience gives us hope, for just as we've seen an audience develop for Third World Cinema and for documentaries, so now we are seeing the British films in our catalogue go out more frequently. This, together with increased independent production and the opening of our cinema, makes us hopeful that TOC is beginning to repay the investment of many people's energies—and money—over the first, difficult years.

NICK HART-WILLIAMS

Essential Cinema

Essential Cinema Ltd. is the son of New Cinema Presentations, begat by the Short Film Service which I sired in January 1964 after ten years as a freelance critic. To step from reviewing to wheeling and dealing may look like a total turnabout. (For Years He Wrote Unpaid for *Tribune*—Now He Grows Fat in Wardour Street.) To me it seems consistent enough. As a somewhat widespread critic, once covering the same film for *SIGHT AND SOUND*, *Picturegoer*, *Tribune* and the *Financial Times*, I was mainly motivated by an eagerness to share the sheer pleasure of the best films. As an agent, distributor and exhibitor, I've felt able to take more practical measures to ensure that delights which would otherwise be confined to private screenings or festivals can be more widely enjoyed.

After tending the shorts in the 1963 London Film Festival, I decided to try to work on behalf of some of the best of the independent shorts which were being so wretchedly neglected. The Short Film Service aimed to place the best foreign shorts in British cinemas, but swiftly became as international in selling films as in acquiring them. One coup, selling an American short to Cuba, was only capped by selling another American short to America. But the Service proved an instructive albatross, instantly demanding an eight day week and eventually more hired help than it could ever afford. No one could have designed a better crash course in business basics—but the tuition fees were horribly expensive. The Short Film Service still exists, but it operates far more guardedly than in the past.

Selling a two-minute cartoon can take as much time and energy as a two-hour feature, but the producer—and his agent—can only earn an infinitesimal fraction of the price. Once this horrid fact had been digested an equally sad lesson had to be learned: that no amount of agitation (the Short Film-Makers' Campaign, Derrick Knight's book



Derek Hill outside the Essential Cinema, Wardour Street

A Long Look at Short Films, the Service's own much publicised screenings) could wrinkle any practical support from the industry, the government or the British Film Institute.

Inevitably, I began to apply some of the lessons learned in promoting and selling shorts to features. The New Cinema Club, which I started in 1967, endeavoured to provide a showcase for the best independent films which were confronted with problems of exhibition, distribution or censorship, and to overcome whichever obstacle they faced. In six years the Club introduced two hundred programmes, including the first British presentations of Borowczyk, Makavejev, Oshima, Rocha and Warhol. During those six years alternative opportunities for such work so expanded that in 1973 the Club seemed to have fulfilled its aim of making itself unnecessary, and it closed as cheerfully as it began.

Meanwhile I had set up a third company, Essential Cinema, designed to be even more flexible in exhibition and distribution. Since 1970 its basic occupation has been programming the weekend screenings at the Institute of Contemporary Arts, where audiences have risen from a handful to 1,500 per weekend and are still increasing. More recently Essential has begun to acquire British rights in foreign features, most of which should have come here long ago but somehow never made it. 'Would you not acquire a film because you were doubtful about its audience potential?' enquires SIGHT AND SOUND's invitation to contribute to this survey. Essential actually specialises in acquiring films once everyone else has dismissed their potential.

We began by enabling Kurosawa's *Dodes' ka Den* to make its way via ICA screenings and BFI 16mm and Regional Film Theatre distribution. Delvaux's *Rendezvous at Bray*, which one of London's most reputed distributor-exhibitors refused to view because Delvaux's UK track record was uncommercial, triumphed at the Minema with a ten week run. As I write Franju's *La Faute de l'Abbé Mouret* approaches its fifth month

at the Berkeley I, and Carle's *La Vraie Nature de Bernadette* goes into its second month at Berkeley 2 with steadily increasing audiences. Coming shortly: Makavejev's *Man is not a Bird*, Bresson's *Four Nights of a Dreamer*, Zolt Kezdi Kovács' *When Joseph Returns* and Orson Welles' *F For Fake*, each of which will be given just as individual a launch by Essential, and some of which will have 16mm and Regional Film Theatre release by the BFI. A distributor keen to launch a 'neglected' film—i.e. one which no one believes can earn him any money—needs to weave himself some kind of safety net. An early commitment from the BFI can make the risk less hazardous.

But BFI support has often been withheld when it seemed likely. For example, Essential's biggest gamble to date was Kobayashi's superlative *Kaseki*. A five week run at the Academy earned the film splendid reviews and no money whatsoever. Print costs of this three-and-a-half hour colour film meant and still mean that the film will get no other screenings in this country on 35mm or 16mm unless distribution is effectively subsidised, a step which the Institute has rejected on the grounds that there is insufficient documentation on Kobayashi. Yet the Academy presentation persuaded BBC Television to acquire *Kaseki* for transmission. Hopefully, the impact of the BBC's enterprise may prompt the BFI to think again.

Essential's deliberate no-policy policy enables it to respond to every kind of film and every kind of situation. At the ICA we introduced the first survey of Kung Fu films from Hong Kong in tandem with films from mainland China, rediscovered Betty Boop and launched London's first lunchtime cinema and first regular family matinées. Outside London, Essential has initiated or collaborated on programmes ranging from HTV's summer seasons of offbeat features to a successful animation festival in Welwyn Garden City.

Naturally there can be as much satisfaction in the financial success of a programme as in its artistic success, especially as costs and risks soar. A house filled exactly to capacity, with no one turned away, is as profoundly gratifying to the entrepreneur as to the creator, and if matters have been so harmoniously arranged that benefits are equally enjoyed the result is quite exquisitely blissful... Audiences vote via the box-office and it's not easy to get a more ambitious dialogue under way.

Enticing the audience becomes a complex operation when the title, director and cast of a film are virtually unknown. Press reaction is vital. The critics' reaction to *Warrendale* won the New Cinema Club two thousand members in its first month. *Rendezvous at Bray* broke the house record at the Minema in its first week without a penny being spent on display advertising, solely as a result of the extensive reviews. Ten years of attending press shows gave me not only an unusually friendly relationship with most of the critics, but an invaluable understanding of the kind of presentation and timing that allow them to wax enthusiastic at length. Similarly, television producers often see the unusual character of our programmes as a basis for off-beat items.

Where do we go from here? After years of negotiations we've opened the Essential, our own Wardour Street cinema offering

first run presentations of exceptional films from independent distributors with no outlet of their own (such as *Some Call It Loving*, James B. Harris' London Film Festival success, for which Pleasant Pastures were previously only offered sexploitation openings). The Essential also offers West End runs for successes from less central situations, such as the Gate, the Phoenix, the Paris Pullman, the Electric and the Screen on the Green. We are discussing an 'amenity' cinema in South London with new programming conceptions which I'm convinced could save the majority of doomed local cinemas. We are planning an ICA season of outstanding Indian films by directors whose work is practically unknown here, and acquiring at least one for distribution. And tomorrow there may be some new kind of cinematic experience to be relished and, above all, to be shared.

DEREK HILL

Contemporary Films

Contemporary Films this year celebrated its 25th year. From small beginnings in 1951, when we released films only on 16mm, mainly to the film society movement, we subsequently arranged with various other United Kingdom distributors to obtain from them the 16mm rights of their films. In this way Contemporary built up the basis of its present library of classics—films like Eisenstein's *Battleship Potemkin*, Alexander Nevsky, Leontine Sagan's *Mädchen in Uniform*, Gustav Ucicky's *The Broken Jug*. These were the first. We continued in this way for two or three years, but found that our work was severely hampered without acquiring the 35mm rights as well. 1954 saw the beginnings of a wider scope of activity, when we started acquiring the entire rights for the UK of films we purchased. Contemporary launched into the theatrical field; nevertheless, we continued working closely with the film society movement, which today in the Federation alone numbers 700.

Our first priority in selecting films for release is based on our own judgment, taking into account both quality and content. Does the film have something important to say; is the director breaking new ground in his presentation? But as we often have very different views as to what is 'important' and 'new', this makes for a much wider selection of films than if it was left to the decision of just one person. Our relationship with the critics is very much a complementary one. Sometimes we purchase films which they strongly recommend to us and at other

Contemporary: 'Memories of Underdevelopment'



times it is the critics who are introduced to new directors through our choice. In pursuing an adventurous policy in acquiring films, we cannot rely beforehand on being assured of an audience. We can only know this once the film has opened, and then it might take a few years for a director's reputation to become established. Unlike the commercial companies, we see the life and potential of a film in years rather than in its immediate release. After their London openings we aim to release the films as quickly as possible throughout the provinces. This has mainly been achieved through the efforts of the Regional Film Theatres of the BFI and through the film society movement.

Our intention and policy when we started, and as it remains today, is to break through the isolation which exists, created by the American domination of British cinemas to an extent of roughly 75 per cent of screening time. Why did we think this important? We believed that if English audiences are only exposed to American and the few British films, then a whole spectrum of culture (if we accept the cinema as such) must be forever lost to audiences here. As a result of our endeavours, new and formerly unknown directors such as Bertolucci, Wajda, Bergman, Ray, Ozu and many others were introduced to audiences here for the first time. Side by side with our policy of bringing in the best of world cinema has been our aim to widen the scope of our library to promote films which involve a social and political need—films which say something of the reality of war (*Kanal, Unknown Soldier*); films which present an alternative point of view (*Inside North Vietnam, End of the Dialogue, A Sense of Loss*); films which help to create a better understanding between peoples (*China, Memories of Underdevelopment*). Although the social and political themes predominate, this is not to say that these films are not also of a high artistic quality.

As long as we in Contemporary remain faithful to our criteria of selection, there will never be 'easy' areas of release. All films require the utmost care, the right sort of publicity to capture a potential audience's imagination, stunning reviews, right weather conditions, no press strikes, and then if you are lucky enough to have all these prerequisites, you might have a success on your hands. In other words there is no such thing as 'difficult' or 'easy' areas of release. Each film has to be taken on its own merit and treated individually.

In 1967 we were involved in the acquisition of the Paris Pullman in South Kensington and last year opened the Phoenix in North London. These two cinemas guarantee us the release of our films. Acquiring our own cinemas has also enabled us to obtain a sort of feedback from our audiences. There are various ways in which this happens. One is through the managers at both cinemas, who act as a channel of information between our audience and ourselves. This is limited, however, and although we like to encourage far greater audience participation than the normal cinema set-up allows, we are aware of a lack of real possibilities. One way is by inviting directors to meet the audience and answer questions; another way is by a series of Sunday afternoon shows at the Phoenix, when we put on special screenings of films

of a political or social character and follow these screenings by audience discussion. Films which have been presented in this way are Susan Sontag's *Promised Lands* and Sue Crockford's film on nursery schools, *One Two Three*. It is hoped to continue this in the autumn with Marcel Ophuls' film on Ireland called *A Sense of Loss*. These special Sunday showings have been most successful, and they do open the way for an exciting approach in cinema viewing.

Whilst we do wish to extend our operation outside London, we are all too aware of the slowness in acquiring further cinemas. It is our belief that London, like Paris, does not need to have its first-run art cinemas just in the centre but that these can be spread around in suitable areas over the entire city and then in the provinces. We would see the development of this circuit outside London as being made up of some of the existing Regional Film Theatres, some of the independent cinema owners, and where major companies have tripled and quadrupled, a cinema in some of these complexes could also come into the new circuit. The film society movement could also be brought into this new development. It would have a definite policy of opening the best international and domestic films; and we would hope that, as with the French art cinema circuit which now numbers 600 cinemas, there could be aid in the form of some tax remission. State aid, low interest loans, or local authority co-operation could also enable such a circuit to get under way.

Another area requiring state aid is the production and exhibition of shorts. We would be in favour of some incentive to encourage cinemas to show independently made shorts and documentaries, and that these be given a percentage share of the entire programme return. Certainly the incentive, as in some other countries, should be to encourage the showing of good shorts, as these add considerably to the entertainment value of the programme apart from their value in training future feature filmmakers.

With other independent film distributors, we formed at the beginning of 1973 the Independent Film Distributors Association. The prime aims of this Association are to give the best possible service and to ensure the maximum release for worthwhile films (including shorts, documentaries and cartoons) throughout this country and abroad. After three and a half years the organisation, now formed of 18 member companies, is working well, and our joint efforts have enabled us to speak with a united voice to government representatives and others and to work towards creating an invigorated British film industry. IFDA has recently set up its own exhibition company, to assist art centres and others all over the country in arranging and booking creative programmes.

Perhaps for us the main objective for the future is the need for a healthy third circuit of cinemas. We are happy to play our part in this either as an independent company, or in conjunction with others as in IFDA or with any government, local authority or arts councils. We will be glad to hear from any person or organisation who is prepared to work with us to achieve this common aim. The type of circuit we have in mind will open the way for the release of British films, independently made, and foreign films. In

addition we feel that the release of foreign films (other than American) in Britain on a national scale will encourage the release of British films in many countries which now close their doors to our films because of our failure to reciprocate.

As with other areas of artistic endeavour, the cinema too must change if it is to remain vital and retain its relevance to the public. As with all audiences today, we find that ours falls mainly within the 18-30 age group. Our audience is an informed audience, both socially and politically, and it is therefore always a challenge to us to satisfy its needs.

CHARLES AND KITTY COOPER

Academy Cinemas

1. *Selection of Films.* Our criteria for selecting a film have not really changed over the years. They are personal, as all critical choices must be, without, we hope, being unduly idiosyncratic. To the best of our ability, we try to select films on artistic grounds—i.e., to put it briefly, on the quality of what the film has to say and the way it says it. To be more precise than that would require a small treatise... This means that 'audience potential' plays really no part at all in our selection policy (except in the case of revivals, where we try to give our patrons films they asked for). We feel strongly that, as far as the selection of films is concerned, one must either follow one's own judgment and hope one will find a sufficiently large audience to share it, or try to give the public what one thinks they want to see. Anything in between is likely to be fatal. We should add that we have no particular social, political or aesthetic axe to grind.

2. *Provenance of Films.* Films may be offered to us by their British distributors, or sent to us from abroad by their makers or agents. We also attend film festivals and view films abroad, whenever necessary. Quite often we 'discover' a film and then find an English distributor for it. Or we may take it into distribution ourselves.

3. *Audiences.* As far as the size of our audience is concerned, there is, we think,

Academy long-runner: 'Les Enfants du Paradis'



no doubt that it has increased over the years. However, the size and composition of the audience varies so much from film to film that it would be unsafe to make any further generalisations.

4. *Press Relations*. Our relations with the press and magazine critics have always been excellent, and what successes we have had have been due to a considerable extent to their support.

5. *'Difficult Areas'*. There is no doubt that some films are easier to launch than others. 'Rave' reviews can make any film a success, but—other things being equal—a film by a well-known French or Italian director stands a better chance of success than one by, say, an unknown Albanian film-maker. As far as Japanese films are concerned, our experience has been that samurai films, particularly those directed by Kurosawa and starring Mifune, attract large audiences. Modern Japanese films, even when they receive enthusiastic reviews (like Oshima's *The Boy*) attract a much smaller public. Other danger areas are subjects like cancer (*Kaseki*) and epilepsy (*Fists in the Pocket*), about which our audience seems to be squeamish. Nor is our audience very keen on war films.

6. *Feedback*. Our main contact with our audience is by correspondence. We receive a large number of letters, containing congratulations, criticisms, requests and recommendations. They are carefully studied and replied to in full. As already mentioned, however, this does not mean that we conduct our programme policy on a kind of postal public opinion poll basis. The choice of films is ours, and ours alone.

7. *Short Films*. We naturally attach great importance to short films, as any new talent is likely to show itself first in this field. We are only sorry that short films are not reviewed more regularly in the press. We should like to show the press every programme in full, including the shorts, as it is shown in public performance, but this, we have long been told, is impossible, owing to the shortage of critics' viewing time and the lack of space in their review columns.

8. *Advertising*. Our advertising is fairly simple and mainly features excerpts from the reviews a film has received. No doubt we could do with more advertising, but the amount of money available for advertising our kind of film is pretty limited. We don't even think of anything like 'saturation' advertising. Word of mouth publicity is obviously very important, but it is not an independent variable.

G. M. HOELLERING
I. R. JAROSY

Antony Balch Films

'Come on up,' said John Trevelyan, actually beckoning from the bay window on the second floor of the British Board of Film Censors' offices. Offering me a gin and tonic from the cocktail cabinet (the censor always offers you a drink), he announced, 'You'll be glad to know we're going to pass it. Can't understand why we objected to it. I think the freaks are perfectly sweet.' It had taken the BBFC thirty years to allow Tod Browning's masterpiece on to the British screen. Like the interminable luggage delay at Heathrow Airport, it can be the longest



'I'll become a distributor to show "Freaks" . . .'

wait in the world to get the English to make up their minds, bogged down in a quagmire of gentlemen's agreements and no constitution.

I never intended to distribute movies, only to make them. I had first seen *Freaks* mentioned as a child in an early 1930s film album, where the only reference was to its prohibition. I first saw the film at the Cinéma-mathèque in Paris with the last reel missing. Raymond Rohauer, who held the rights at that time, asked me if I was a distributor and I told him no, but I'll become one to show *Freaks*. A classic, banned for thirty years, and eminently suited to playing around the country as a horror film, it was perfect. The best of all possible worlds. We opened it in May 1963 at the Paris Pullman with Godard's *Vivre sa Vie* and my film with William Burroughs, *Towers Open Fire*, as the supporting programme. Focusing the projector, tearing the tickets, and having an orgasm on the screen were the peripheral duties of that première, aptly attended by the wise and witty sexologists Drs. Phyllis and Eberhard Kronhausen.

The thrill of the forbidden invaded my childhood in the form of 'exploitation' pictures and their lurid advertising. *Mad Monster and Buried Alive* with H (London) certificates in Brixton; *Devil Bat* ('Don't you think he's too young to see this sort of thing') at the Princess, Burnham-on-Crouch; the doorman at the Rialto advising mother that *Orphée* was unsuitable, 'peculiar'. You could always get in at the Court, Malden Road, when there was an 'X' film playing and it had the advantage of really good projection. Such outings did not detract from the healthy glamour of the opening of *Singin' in the Rain* at the Empire or *When Worlds Collide* at the Plaza, but there was a particular sensation in the intestines as the lights dimmed in rainy Clapham at 12 noon for the film you weren't supposed to see. Some children steal sweets, others form gangs. I wanted to see the too horrible monsters, the too daring themes, the too overt action. I learned to spot censor cuts—dust preceding and following a positive splice even on a new print accompanied by that something missing feeling—long before I had the indignity of actually having to make those cuts in order to earn my living.

England does not offer a very large market compared to other European countries. Independent producers abroad are often surprised by the small guarantees offered for their product in England. This is not just tough dealing on the part of British distributors, but a reflection of the fact that we

only have 1,500 cinemas left, as against nearly 4,000 in France and 9,000 in Italy. This is why a producer will often wait so long to sell to the UK. He's still hoping to get a better deal. Many fine films are held up on Ye Olde Englishe conveyor belt for that very reason. Of our 1,500 cinemas, probably only 1,000 are really worth playing in from a distributor's revenue standpoint. With major companies justifiably taking up a large amount of the available playing time, an independent distributor has to make sure that he has merchandise and the packaging to make it go. Otherwise, with today's inflated costs for prints and advertising, he will simply go out of business. The importation of subtitled films is, with few exceptions, a labour of love, unless the importer has a first run cinema where the film is to be shown or has close ties with one.

With a little care and attention some unlikely but worthwhile films can be packaged to win on a wider market and give audiences a lot of pleasure. Often the angle is sex. Last year I was roundly criticised for selling Alain Jessua's *Traitement de Choc* as *The Doctor in the Nude*. It was suggested that had I been the distributor of *Nanook of the North* I would have called it *Come, Warm My Igloo*. Well, I wouldn't. 'Commands' seldom entice audiences. It's much better to say who, or what or where. *The Doctor in the Nude* certainly states who and what, and since most of the critics carried on about the title it gave the film extra publicity. In certain circumstances I feel this kind of packaging is useful. The film had been lying around dubbed on the French shelf for two years, but I made sure that the first run had a specially subtitled original version print on view. The result was that over 100,000 people around the country have now seen a film—either in English or in French—which might possibly have died a natural death with its modest credentials—Delon, Girardot and Jessua are not enormous draws over here in spite of their talents.

You see, all images are lies. The image on the package, the image on the screen. The camera always lies, and we love it. 'Thou shalt not make for thyself any graven image'; of all the ten commandments that's one Cecil B. DeMille didn't have any qualms about; neither did the blind lady in *Peeping Tom*, 'What are those films you can't wait to see when you get home, Mark?' In the film business your merchandise is shadows. You open the doors and they either show up or they don't. But they only come at all when that mental image picture lights up in their brain. A title, a subject, a star, an article can turn on that brain picture switch and it's 'Two £1.25s please.' Note that one or at most two items are all you need. Multiply the points of appeal and they get confused and don't show. The film that works best at the box-office is often the film with one talking point only, no matter what that talking point may be. You like to handle films you like personally, but it doesn't always work out like that. Good films flop, good films succeed. Bad films flop, bad films succeed. The piece of rubbish you wish you hadn't bought turns out to be a big hit, the movie you adored is only so-so. But it's chemistry mainly, you have to be right more often than you are wrong, 'smiling as you watch those benches filling.'

ANTONY BALCH



'The streets were dark with something more than night. . .' Edward G. Robinson in 'Woman in the Window'

NO WAY OUT

EXISTENTIAL MOTIFS IN THE FILM NOIR

Robert G. Porfirio

The *film noir*, a Hollywood staple of the 1940s and 1950s, has come into its own as a topic of critical investigation. By now both its foreign and domestic roots (German expressionism, French poetic realism; the gangster film and the hard-boiled novel) have been clearly established. The mordant sensibilities of the 'Germanic' emigrés and their penchant for a visual style which emphasised mannered lighting and startling camera angles provided a rich resource for a film industry newly attuned to the commercial possibilities of that hard-boiled fiction so popular in the 1930s. It was a style and sensibility quite compatible with a literature dealing with private eyes and middle-class crime, one bent on taking a tough approach towards American life. Following the success of *Double Indemnity* and *Murder, My Sweet* (U.K.: *Farewell, My Lovely*), both made in 1944, this 'Germanic' tradition was quickly assimilated by others and the era of *film noir* was in full bloom. The one major domestic contribution to the style, the post-war semi-documentary, moved the *film noir* out of the 'studio' period into new directions. The police documentaries (*T-Men*, *Street with No Name*), the exposés (*Captive City*, *The Enforcer* [U.K.: *Murder Inc.*]) and the socially oriented thrillers (*Crossfire*, *The Sound of Fury*) in turn gave way to films which could no longer be placed within the *noir* tradition (*The Line-Up*, *Murder, Incorporated*, *On the Waterfront*). It is as if the *film noir* tradition fragmented as its initial energies dissipated along new lines, and all but disappeared in the 1950s when audiences dwindled and Hollywood resorted to new styles, subjects and techniques.

I have refrained for a number of reasons from referring to *film noir* as a genre. To treat it as a genre is certainly tempting, since it simplifies the way in which it can be handled, even though it may never place the *film noir* within a specific semantical locus. Yet we must ground the term in some sort of adequate working definition if it is to warrant serious consideration as an object of either film or cultural history. While it sidesteps the semantical problem, a generic definition creates a host of new ones. For one thing, the *film noir* cuts across many of the traditional genres: the gangster film (*White Heat*), the Western (*Pursued*), the comedy (*Unfaithfully Yours*); and this means we must create a genre out of pre-existing categories.

Though the classic gangster film preceded the *film noir*, there remain gangster films of this period that are quite clearly *noir* (*The Gangster*, 1947) and others that are clearly not (*Dillinger*, 1945). The same could be said for the suspense thriller (*Strangers on a Train* is, while *I Confess* is not). And this is equally true for the private eye, mystery or

crime film—some are and some aren't. As a matter of fact, if one looks at the descriptions of these films in the trade journals of the period or speaks with some of the people involved in their production, one discovers rather quickly that the term *film noir* was then unknown in America and that the closest equivalent was 'psychological melodrama (or thriller)'. And perhaps this is the appropriate English term, since there is a psychological dimension and at least some aspect of crime (real or imagined) in every *film noir* that I have seen.

In his article 'The Family Tree of Film Noir', Raymond Durgnat perceptively attacks generic definition by demonstrating that *film noir*, unlike other genres, 'takes us into the realms of classification by motif and tone.' Durgnat then hastily arranges the *film noir* into eleven thematic categories, including over 300 titles as diverse as *King Kong* and *2001*. From the standpoint of critical justification, however, his conception resolves nothing and creates more problems than it answers. Paul Schrader, in his 'Notes on Film Noir', provides a way out by suggesting that *film noir* be conceived of as a specific period or cycle of films, analogous to the French new wave or Italian neo-realism: 'In general, *film noir* refers to those Hollywood films of the 40s and early 50s which portrayed the world of dark, slick city streets, crime and corruption. *Film noir* is an extremely unwieldy period. It harks back to many previous periods...'

It is a period which at most lasted no longer than twenty years: from 1940 (*Stranger on the Third Floor*) roughly to 1960 (*Odds Against Tomorrow*). It is an unwieldy period because it was less self-conscious and articulated than, say, Italian neo-realism and because of the lack of precision with which it has been treated. Its extreme commerciality, particularly in the 1940s before theatre audiences dried up, meant that the *film noir* included large numbers of 'B' films, which most scholars have refused to take seriously.

Film noir is by nature time-bound, and it is this that makes modern 'revivals', whether done in period (*Chinatown*) or not (*The Long Goodbye*), something other than what they pretend to be. But to place these films within a specific time period is not enough. Schrader was right in insisting upon both visual style and mood as criteria. Their so-called 'expressionistic' style was quite literally a combination of impressionistic (i.e. technical effects) and expressionistic (i.e. *mise en scène*) techniques, which can be traced back to the period of German Expressionism. The infusion of this style into Hollywood film-making was due partly to the talents of the European emigrés and partly to the growth of the classic gangster and horror genres of the 1930s which called for such a style. But the unique development of this style in the *film noir* was most immediately due to *Citizen Kane*. Welles' film not only invigorated a baroque visual style which was later to characterise the period, but also provided a new psychological dimension, a morally ambiguous hero, a convoluted time structure and the use of flashback and first person narration—all of which became *film noir* conventions. It is no surprise that Welles later made some classic *films noirs* (*The Stranger*, *Lady from Shanghai*, *Touch of Evil*) and some near misses (*Journey*

into Fear, *Mr. Arkadin*) and provided a permanent blueprint for what might now be termed RKO *noir*. (Edward Dmytryk, who made *Farewell, My Lovely*, has reaffirmed the influence of Welles on the RKO 'look'; appropriately, both he and Welles have acknowledged a debt to Murnau.)

Visual style rescued many an otherwise pedestrian film from oblivion. But it was not everything; nor was the presence of crime, in some guise, the fundamental defining motif. The 1940s saw the production of many routine thrillers which contained the requisite visual style yet fail as *film noir*. What keeps the *film noir* alive for us today is something more than a spurious nostalgia. It is the underlying mood of pessimism which undercuts any attempted happy endings and prevents the films from being the typical Hollywood escapist fare many were originally intended to be. More than lighting or photography, it is this sensibility which makes the black film black for us.

As Alfred Appel has noted in his book *Nabokov's Dark Cinema*: 'What unites the seemingly disparate kinds of *films noirs*, then, is their dark visual style and their black vision of despair, loneliness and dread—a vision that touches an audience most intimately because it assures that their suppressed impulses and fears are shared human responses.' This 'black vision' is nothing less than an existential attitude towards life, and as Appel has indicated it is what unifies films as diverse as *The Maltese Falcon* (private eye), *Detour* (crime), *The Lodger* (period piece), *Brute Force* (prison film), *Woman in the Window* (psychological melodrama) and *Pursued* (Western).

In attempting to discuss some of the existential motifs in American *film noir*, I do not wish to tie myself too closely to the specific philosophy which evolved through the writings of successive generations of thinkers. Indeed, existentialism as a philosophical movement was largely unknown in America until after World War II, when the French variety was popularised by the writings and personal fame of two of its greatest exponents, Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus. William Barrett, in his excellent book *Irrational Man* (1962), argues that initially existentialism went against the positivist bias of Anglo-American culture: 'The American has not yet assimilated psychologically the disappearance of his own geographical frontier, his spiritual horizon is still the limitless play of human possibilities, and as yet he has not lived through the crucial experience of human finitude.' If existentialism did gain a foothold in post-war America, it was only after this optimism had been successively challenged by the Depression; the rise of totalitarianism; the fear of Communism; the loss of insular security; and, finally, the tarnishing of the ideal of individual initiative with the growth of the technocratic state. Even French existentialism, so closely tied to the underground Resistance and prison camps, represented an earlier response to many of the same challenges to the integrity of self.

Existentialism is another term which defies exact definition. As a philosophical school of thought it has included both Christian and atheist, conservative and Marxist. For our purposes, it is best to view it as an attitude characteristic of the modern spirit, a powerful and complex cultural movement



Germanic angles and moods of film noir: Laird Cregar in John Brahm's 'The Lodger'; Joan Crawford in 'Possessed'



The prison as microcosm: Burt Lancaster in 'Brute Force'

erupting somewhere on the edges of the Romantic tradition, and therefore a result of some of the same cultural energies which led to surrealism, expressionism and literary naturalism. Existentialism is an outlook which begins with a disoriented individual facing a confused world that he cannot accept. It places its emphasis on man's contingency in a world where there are no transcendental values or moral absolutes, a world devoid of any meaning but the one man himself creates. Its more positive aspect is captured in such key phrases as 'freedom', 'authenticity', 'responsibility' and 'the leap into faith (or the absurd)'. Its negative side, the side to which its literary exponents are most closely drawn, emphasises life's meaninglessness and man's alienation; its catchwords include 'nothingness', 'sickness', 'loneliness', 'dread', 'nausea'. The special affinity of the *film noir* for this aspect of existentialism is nowhere better evidenced than in a random sampling of some of its most suggestive titles: *Corned*, *One Way Street*, *No Way Out*, *Caged*, *The Dark Corner*, *In a Lonely Place*.

In *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Camus recognised that the confrontation of life's emptiness made suicide a dangerous and tempting escape. To withstand this temptation, Camus and Sartre offered a few alternatives: a stub-

born perseverance despite the absurdity of existence; a recognition of the community of men; an obsession with social justice; a commitment to Marxism. In an early *film noir*, *I Wake Up Screaming* (1941), the ostensible heavy, police Lieutenant Ed Cornell, demonstrates just this sort of perseverance. While interrogating the sister (Betty Grable) of the murdered girl he worshipped from afar, he responds to her question ('What's the use of living without hope?') with the telling reply, 'It can be done.' Sensitive portrayed by Laird Cregar, Cornell is no lout but a skilled detective, a man of some taste and intelligence. He becomes the ironic victim of the perfidy of a girl unworthy of his love (Carole Landis) and of the unyielding demand for professional perfection placed upon him by the police department. Unlike most of Camus' heroes, Cornell yields to the temptation of suicide, but remains a pathetic figure capable of engaging our sympathies.

It would be untenable to assert that the American *film noir* was directly affected by the writings of the European existentialists, although after the end of the war there were a few films like *Brute Force*, which in its use of a prison as microcosm and in the fascist nature of its major antagonist indicates a familiarity with French existential novels. In any case, such attempts on the part of Hollywood to borrow directly from that European tradition would have been rare indeed, particularly in the 1940s. It is more likely that this existential bias was drawn from a source much nearer at hand—the hard-boiled school of fiction without which quite possibly there would have been no *film noir*. Unfortunately, 'hard-boiled' is but one more example of a popular term used rather ambiguously. It includes not only the writers of the *Black Mask* school, but also an extremely diverse group of major and minor talents: Hemingway, whom many consider to be the real father of the tradition; the pure 'tough' writers like James M. Cain and Horace McCoy; and even the radical proletarian writers like B. Traven, Albert Maltz and Daniel Fuchs.* Scant critical attention has been paid to the literary tough guys, who have been forced to join the other 'boys in the back room' (as Edmund Wilson once pejoratively termed some of them). Since they worked within narrow genres, set themselves limited goals and wrote fiction geared for a mass market, they lacked the elitist respectability of their famous Jazz Age predecessors. Although a few have recently come into their own, that they were taken seriously at all in the past was largely due to their association with the much brighter light of Hemingway's reputation and to the unique and almost symbiotic relationship which they had with the French existential writers. The very term *film noir* was coined in 1946 by the cineaste Nino Frank from Marcel Duhamel's famous 'Série Noire' book series.

*Together with the 'tough' writers like Hammett, Chandler, McCoy and Cain, 'proletarian' authors Fuchs, Bezzerides, Maltz and others were part of the literary exodus to Hollywood in the 1930s and 1940s. Many became friends or part of a radical colony there, but by and large the *films noirs* they were associated with exhibit more of an existential than a radical outlook (*Thieves Highway* is a good example); a result no doubt of the political climate in America at the time.



Detachment: Bogart's Sam Spade sending Brigid (Mary Astor) 'over' in 'The Maltese Falcon'



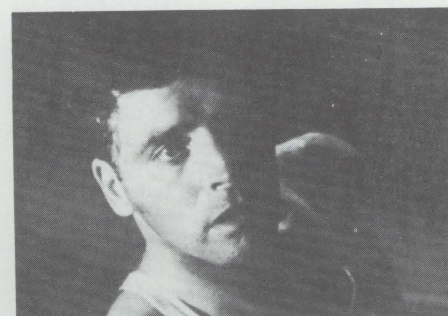
Passivity and neurosis: Robert Mitchum and Robert Ryan in 'The Racket'



Hemingway's tough guys: Charles McGraw and William Conrad in 'The Killers'



'Some day fate can put the finger on you . . .': Tom Neal in 'Detour'



'Everybody dies. . . .' Burt Lancaster in 'The Killers'

Perhaps André Gide was not being completely candid when he surprised some American dignitaries at a party held during World War II by telling them that Dashiell Hammett was the one contemporary American novelist worthy of serious consideration, because he was the only one who kept his work free of the pollution of moral judgments. In any case, the virtue that Gide attributed to Hammett is present in his fiction, and the American intellectual community is no longer quite so willing to write off the adulation of their counterparts in France for such writers as some sort of foreign aberration.

It is not necessary to go further here in establishing connections between European existentialism and the hard-boiled literary tradition. If, as William Barrett suggests, existentialism is foreign to the generally optimistic and confident outlook of American society, then the vast popularity of the hard-boiled writers of the 1930s went far to 'soften' this confidence and prepare audiences for a new sort of pessimistic film which would surface in the 1940s. Keeping in mind the debt to this literary tradition, here then are some of the major existential motifs of the *film noir*.

The Non-heroic Hero

The word 'hero' never seems to fit the *noir* protagonist, for his world is devoid of the moral framework necessary to produce the traditional hero. He has been wrenched from familiar moorings, and is a hero only in the modern sense in which that word has been progressively redefined to fit the existential bias of contemporary fiction. For the past fifty years we have groped for some term that would more aptly describe such a protagonist: the Hemingway hero; the anti-hero; the rebel hero; the non-hero.

In one respect the Sam Spade of Huston's *The Maltese Falcon* (1941), as portrayed by Humphrey Bogart, is the least typical *noir* hero since he is the least vulnerable. Unlike Warner Brothers' first two attempts at the novel (1931 and 1936), this third is quite faithful to both the letter and the spirit of the Hammett original. The film's one unfortunate omission is the Flitcraft parable Spade tells Brigid O'Shaughnessy, for this is our only chance to peep into Spade's interior life. And what it reveals is that Spade is by nature an existentialist, with a strong conception of the randomness of existence. Robert Edenbaum sees Spade as representative of Hammett's 'daemonic' tough guy: '... He is free of sentiment, of the fear of death, of the temptations of money and sex. He is what Albert Camus calls "a man without memory", free of the burden of the past. He is capable of any action, without regard to conventional morality, and thus is apparently as amoral . . . as his antagonists. His refusal to submit to the trammels which limit ordinary mortals results in a godlike immunity and independence, beyond the power of his enemies . . . [but] the price he pays for his power is to be cut off behind his own self-imposed masks, in an isolation that no criminal, in a community of crime, has to face.'*

*'The Poetics of the Private Eyes', in *Tough Guy Writers of the Thirties*, edited by David Madden. (Carbondale, Illinois, 1968).

If the film's conclusion mitigates a little the bleak isolation of Hammett's Spade, it maintains the 'daemonic' qualities of his nature through the sinister aspect of Bogart's persona, so apparent in his final confrontation with Brigid (Mary Astor). In Huston's ending, Spade's ability to dismiss the falcon, the one object of 'faith' in the story, as 'the stuff that dreams are made of' shows him to be more detached than almost any Hemingway hero. This stoic stance would be emulated, but seldom equalled, by many of the actors who dominated the period: by Bogart himself (*Dead Reckoning*, *Dark Passage*), followed in rapid succession by Alan Ladd (*This Gun for Hire*, *The Glass Key*) and a veritable army of tough guys—Edmund O'Brien, Robert Mitchum, Robert Ryan, Richard Widmark, Burt Lancaster, Kirk Douglas. By their physical make-up, their vocal qualities and their dress, as well as by the dialogue given them, these actors defined the tough guy regardless of whether they played detective or criminal. They also suggested varying degrees of vulnerability.

Critics have reminded us that the Hemingway hero is a person 'to whom something has been done'; that most central to this hero is the loss, and an awareness of it, of all the fixed ties that bind a man to a community. This is an apt description of the *film noir* hero as well, and a real strength of Hollywood's studio system was to cast to type. Vulnerability and a sense of loss were suggested in Humphrey Bogart's lined face and slightly bent posture; in Alan Ladd's short stature and a certain feminine quality about his face; in the passivity and the heavy-lidded eyes of Robert Mitchum; in the thinly veiled hysteria that lay behind many of Richard Widmark's performances; in Robert Ryan's nervous manner. But this vulnerability was perhaps best embodied in the early screen persona of Burt Lancaster, whose powerful physique ironically dominated the cinematic frame. Unlike the expansive and exaggerated characterisations of later years, the Lancaster of the *film noir* kept his energy levels under rigid control, rarely extending himself and then only to withdraw quickly like a hunted animal. Fittingly, his first screen role was in the Robert Siodmak version of *The Killers* (1946) as the Hemingway character Ole Anderson who passively awaits death at the hands of the hired assassins. Throughout the 1940s Lancaster was adept at capturing the pathos of a character victimised by society (*Brute Force*, *Kiss the Blood Off My Hands*) or by a woman (*The Killers*, *Sorry, Wrong Number*, *Criss Cross*).

As the period progressed, *film noir* heroes seemed to become increasingly vulnerable and subject to pressures beyond their control. Bogart's roles moved from the lonely but impervious Sam Spade to the equally lonely but much less stable Dixon Steele of *In a Lonely Place*. The role of the detective showed the same sort of degeneration, and some succumbed to the corrupt world, becoming criminals themselves (Fred MacMurray in *Pushover*). This malaise is best seen in *The Dark Corner* (1946), whose detective Bradford Galt (Mark Stevens) strives to maintain his personal integrity and hard-nosed style by mouthing the obligatory tough dialogue ('I'm as clean as a hard-boiled egg'). But it's not really enough, and Galt's angst is reflected in his cry: 'I feel all dead

inside... I'm backed up in a dark corner and I don't know who's hitting me!' Yet the typical *noir* protagonist wearily goes on living, seldom engaging in the kind of self-pity displayed by Dana Andrews' con man in *Fallen Angel* (1945) or his wayward cop in *Where the Sidewalk Ends* (1950).

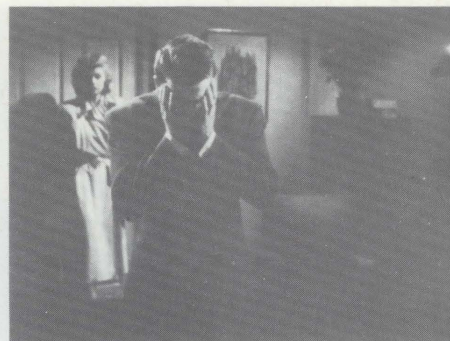
The *mise en scène* of the *film noir* reinforced the vulnerability of its heroes. Although the habitat of the 1930s gangster was 'the dark, sad city of the imagination', the gangster hero himself was generally well illuminated by a bright key-light, though his surroundings may have fallen off into darkness. Not so in the *film noir*. The hero moved in and out of shadows so dark as at times to obscure him completely; diagonal and horizontal lines 'pierced' his body; small, enclosed spaces (a detective's office, a lonely apartment, a hoodlum's hotel bedroom), well modulated with some sort of 'bar' motif (prison bars, shadows, bed posts and other furniture), visually echoed his entrapment. Small wonder that he found it hard to maintain any degree of rational control.

Alienation and Loneliness

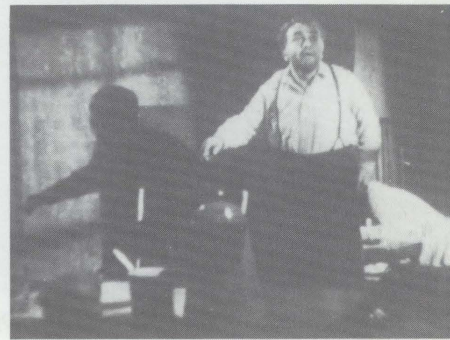
The concept of alienation is crucial to most existentialists from Kierkegaard to Sartre. For them, man stands alone, alienated from any social or intellectual order, and is therefore totally self-dependent. We have seen how this alienation 'works' for the private detective. By keeping emotional involvement to a minimum, the detective gains a degree of power over others but pays the price in terms of loneliness.

To a large degree, every *noir* hero is an alienated man. Even members of the police force or F.B.I. in the semi-documentary films are cut off from the camaraderie of their colleagues and forced to work undercover. The *noir* hero is most often 'a stranger in a hostile world.' In *Ride the Pink Horse*, the disillusioned veteran Gagan (Robert Montgomery) is referred to as 'the man with no place', and he tells a local villager: 'I'm nobody's friend.' Even ostensibly happily married men (Edward G. Robinson in *Woman in the Window*, Dick Powell in *Pitfall*) become alienated from the comforts of home, usually for the sake of a beautiful woman. The homelessness of such characters as Harry Fabian (Richard Widmark) of *Night and the City* or Ole Anderson of *The Killers*, like that of an inhabitant of one of Robert Frost's bleakest winter landscapes, takes on almost cosmic dimensions. This estrangement is recapitulated in the *mise en scène*: bare rooms, dimly lit bars, dark, rain-soaked streets. In the shocking last sequence of *Scarlet Street*, the utter isolation of Chris Cross (Robinson) is underscored by means of an optical trick—all the people in the crowded street disappear from view, and we realise that for him they do not exist.

Sometimes the estrangement of the hero moves to even darker rhythms. Shubunka (Barry Sullivan), the title character of *The Gangster*, is reminiscent of Dostoevsky's underground man in his bitterness and the contempt he holds for his fellow men. In the prologue he tells the audience: 'I knew everything I did was low and rotten. What did I care what people thought of me. I despised them.' In the course of the film we find he despises himself almost as much; and at the end, betrayed by the one person



Mark Stevens in 'The Dark Corner': '... I'm backed up in a dark corner and I don't know who's hitting me'



Edward G. Robinson in 'Scarlet Street': visual 'echoes of entrapment' in the shadows and bars of the setting



Man under Sentence of Death: Henry Fonda as the self-imprisoned killer in 'The Long Night'

he loved (Belita), he allows the syndicate figure who has wrested control of his rackets from him to shoot him down in the rain-soaked street. But before he dies, Shubunka delivers one of the most vitriolic speeches in the annals of the *film noir*: 'My sins are that I wasn't tough enough. I wasn't low or dirty enough. I should have trusted no one; never loved a girl. I should have smashed [the others] first. That's the way the world is.'

Even more misanthropic is Roy Martin (Richard Basehart), the elusive killer of *He Walked By Night*. A master of technology which rivals the police department's, Martin remains little more than a cipher and his motives for becoming a thief and a killer are unclear. Basehart's laconic performance contributes to this ambiguity (as, perhaps, do deficiencies of script and budget). Living alone in a darkened room in a typical Hollywood court, his only companion a small dog, he is literally the underground man, using the sewers as a means of travel and escape. Intelligent men like Shubunka and Martin are no mere victims of a slum environment; their criminality is rather the result of a conscious choice made sensible by the world they inhabit. For them, as for Sartre's characters in *No Exit*, 'Hell is other people.'



'Hell is other people . . .' James Mason in Max Ophüls' *The Reckless Moment*, a film in which *mise en scène* characteristically creates environment

The major female protagonists of the *film noir* were no more socially inclined than the men. The 'femme noire' was usually also a *femme fatale*, and a host of domineering women, castrating bitches, unfaithful wives and black widows seemed to personify the worst of male sexual fantasies. They were played with an aura of unreality by such actresses as Ava Gardner, Rita Hayworth or Gene Tierney, but perhaps most typically by Barbara Stanwyck and Claire Trevor. Even when the heroine was sweet and good (Ida Lupino in *On Dangerous Ground*, Joan Bennett in *The Reckless Moment*), she was for the most part a monad, unwilling or unable to avail herself of the benefits of society.

Existential Choice

The precipitous slide of existentialism towards nihilism is only halted by its heavy emphasis on man's freedom. In exchange for this benefit, the individual must be willing to cast aside the weight of outmoded beliefs in a tough recognition of the meaninglessness of existence. He must choose, in other words, between 'being and nothingness', between the 'authentic' and 'inauthentic' life. The inauthentic life is the unquestioned one which derives its rationale from a facile acceptance of those values external to the self. To live authentically, one must reject these assurances and therein discover the ability to create one's own values; in so doing each individual assumes responsibility for his life through the act of choosing between two alternatives. And since man is his own arbiter, he literally creates good and evil.

For the most viable of the *noir* heroes this element of choice is readily apparent. The private eye exercises this choice in his willingness to face death, prompted only by a sense of duty towards rather dubious clients and a somewhat battered concept of integrity and professionalism. But what of the innocent victims, the fugitives from the law, and the criminals who often function as central protagonists? Existential freedom for them is much less apparent. Yet even the

most victimised among them (like Edmund O'Brien in *D.O.A.* or Tom Neal in *Detour*) have some opportune moments to make choices which will affect their lives. With respect to the fugitives (John Dall and Peggy Cummins in *Gun Crazy*) and middle-class criminals (MacMurray in *Double Indemnity*), their choices appear more mundane than metaphysical and their acts less clearly rebellious against established conventions. Yet all are aware of these conventions, and their decision to disregard them indicates their willingness to live lives untrammelled by moral norms. They exist in a fluid world whose freedom is rather concretely embodied in sex, money, power and the promise of adventure. Thus, one may be motivated by the exhilaration of living dangerously (*Gun Crazy*), another by a desire to 'beat the system' (*Double Indemnity*), others by a desire to break out of pedestrian daily routine and boredom (Robinson in *Woman in the Window*, Dick Powell in *Pitfall*, Van Heflin in *The Prowler*). Like Spade's Flitcraft, they can either fall back into the security of their former roles or make the leap into the absurd, take the gamble in which the stakes are their very lives.

Man Under Sentence of Death

Although many existentialists affirm that every act and attitude of man must be considered a choice, the existential attitude itself is not so much chosen as arrived at. Perhaps this is why the heroes of existential fiction are so perennially faced with the threat of imminent death; certainly such a threat forces the individual to re-examine his life. 'The fable of the man under the sentence of death, writing to us from his prison cell or from the cell of his isolated self, is one of the great literary traditions.' In a perceptive essay in *Tough Guy Writers of the 30s*, Joyce Carol Oates goes on to demonstrate the relevance of this undeniably existential situation to the fiction

of James M. Cain, but its relevance to the *film noir* is equally apparent. Instead of writing his story, the hero tells it to us directly, and the combined techniques of first person narration and flashback enhance the aura of doom. It is almost as if the narrator takes a perverse pleasure in relating the events leading up to his current crisis, his romanticisation of it heightened by his particular surroundings: a wounded man dictating in a darkened office (*Double Indemnity*); an ex-private detective in a dimly lit car telling his fiancée about his sordid past (Robert Mitchum in *Out of the Past* [U.K.: *Build My Gallows High*]); a prisoner in a cell about to be executed (John Garfield in *The Postman Always Rings Twice*); an accountant dying from the irreversible effects of an exotic poison, trying to explain his 'murder' and the vengeance he has exacted for it to a police captain (Edmund O'Brien in *D.O.A.*). One hero, Joe Gillis (William Holden) of *Sunset Boulevard*, is even able to look back upon a life that has been completed, like a character out of Sartre's *No Exit*, beginning his story as a corpse floating face-downwards in a swimming pool.

Like the Hemingway hero, most *film noir* protagonists fear death but are not themselves afraid to die; indeed a good deal of what dignity they possess is derived from the way they react to the threat of death. That the way one dies is important is seen in Philip Marlowe's special admiration for Harry Jones (Elisha Cook, Jr.), the frightened little crook who takes the poison offered him with grim laughter rather than betray his girl friend (*The Big Sleep*). It is seen in the manner in which Cody Jarrett (James Cagney) in *White Heat* spits out: 'I made it, Ma. Top of the world!' just before he ignites the gasoline tank on which he is perched. It is seen in the way the Swede spends those last lonely moments in his hotel room after his refusal to run (*The Killers*). The boxer in *Body and Soul* (John Garfield) puts it best when he tells the racketeer he has just crossed: 'So what are you going to do, kill me? Everybody dies.'

Meaninglessness, Purposelessness, the Absurd

The meaninglessness of man's existence flows naturally from existentialism's emphasis on individual consciousness and its key denial of any sort of cosmic design or moral purpose. For Camus it involved a recognition of the 'benign indifference' of the world, and ultimately a reclamation of a measure of dignity through the sheer persistence of living on despite life's absurdity. This sense of meaninglessness is also present in *film noir*, but there it is not the result of any sort of discursive reasoning. Rather it is an attitude which is worked out through *mise en scène* and plotting. The characters confined to the hermetic world of the films move to a scenario whose driving force is not the result of the inexorable workings of tragic fate or powerful natural forces, but of a kind of pure, Heraclitean flux. Look at the plot of almost any *film noir* and you become aware of the significant role played by blind chance: a car parked on a manhole cover prevents the protagonist's escape and he is shot down by police in the

sewers (*He Walked By Night*); an accountant notarises a bill of sale and is poisoned for this innocent act (*D.O.A.*); a feckless youth is hypnotised into becoming the instrument of a murderer's devious plans simply because he accepted a cough drop in a crowded elevator (*Fear in the Night*, 1947; also *Nightmare*, 1956); a spinsterish psychology professor agrees to have dinner with one of her students and ends up killing him (*The Accused*). Such a list could go on endlessly, but these examples should indicate that such randomness is central to the *noir* world. The hero of *Detour* (Tom Neal) tells us: 'Some day fate, or some mysterious force, can put the finger on you or me for no reason at all.'

Chaos, Violence, Paranoia

The pre-existential world of the classical detective was ordered and meaningful; social aberrations were temporary and quickly righted through the detective's superior powers of deductive reasoning. A product of a rather smug Western society, such a world reflected a Victorian sense of order and a belief in the supremacy of science. The hard-boiled writers replaced this with a corrupt, chaotic world where the detective's greatest asset was the sheer ability to survive with a shred of dignity. Raymond Chandler described this world as a 'wet emptiness' whose 'streets were dark with something more than night.' For most existentialists, the real world was equally inchoate and senseless. Sartre himself found the physical world, the world of things-in-themselves,* slightly disgusting and he associated it with images of softness, stickiness, viscosity, flabbiness. When, for example, Roquentin discovers existence in the experience of disgust in *Nausea*, it is a disgust engendered by the excessiveness of the physical world, represented by a chestnut tree with thick, tangled roots. For Sartre this world was disgusting precisely because it was too rich, too soft, too effusive; behind it lay the Jungian archetype of nature, the fertile female.

The *film noir* best expressed this effusiveness visually through a variety of techniques, the most important of which is the use of deep focus or depth-staging (here, perhaps, the primary influence of Orson Welles). As André Bazin pointed out, the use of this technique (as opposed to the shallow focus and 'invisible' editing of Hollywood films of the 1930s) permitted the cinema more nearly to approximate the 'real' world by allowing the spectator to pick and choose from a wealth of stimuli. Deep focus was an important element of the *noir* visual style until changing conditions and production techniques in the 1950s brought the *film noir* period to a close. In conjunction with chiaroscuro and other expressionistic touches, deep focus helped to create a cinematic world which in its own way embodied those very qualities—decadence, corpulence, viscosity—that Sartre found so disgusting in the physical world. It was a cinematic world that was dark,

oppressive, cluttered and corrupt; characterised by wet city streets, dingy apartments and overfurnished mansions, but above all by an atmosphere thick with the potential for violence. In *T-Men*, for example, an undercover agent (Dennis O'Keefe) shares a nondescript hotel room with a couple of thugs, their virtual prisoner. In one scene, deep focus allows us to keep in view the threatening, brutal figure of Moxy (Charles McGraw) in the background shaving, while the agent is in another room in the extreme foreground, trying to read unobserved a note warning him to flee for his life. In this one sequence, the whole unstable and menacing world of the *film noir* is brilliantly caught.

Camus said that 'at any street corner the absurd may strike a man in the face.' Given the special ambience of *film noir*, the absurd often takes the form of an undercurrent of violence which could literally strike a man at any moment: a trench-coated figure beneath a street-lamp; a car parked on a dark side street; a shadow hiding behind a curtain. The atmosphere is one in which the familiar is fraught with danger and the existential tonalities of 'fear' and 'trembling' are not out of place; even less that sense of 'dread' which is taken to mean a pervasive fear of something hauntingly indeterminate. And just as existentialism itself was partly a response to a war-torn Europe, so too was the disquietude of post-war America (the Communist threat, the Bomb) reflected in the films' fear-ridden atmosphere. Finally, if the Jungian archetype of the female lurks behind Sartre's conception of the natural world, she is equally present in the image of the city conveyed in these films—the city, that is, which Jung himself characterised as a 'harlot'. For the *film noir* protagonist the city is both mother and whore, and the stylised location photography of such semi-documentaries as *Cry of the City* or *The Naked City* adeptly captures its essential corruption and oppressiveness.

Sanctuary, Ritual and Order

Set down in a violent and incoherent world, the *film noir* hero tries to deal with it in the best way he can, attempting to create some order out of chaos, to make some sense of his world. For the detective, of course, this goes with the territory, but it is attempted with an equal sense of urgency by the amnesiac (*Somewhere in the Night*), the falsely accused (*The Blue Dahlia*), the innocent victim (*D.O.A.*), or the loyal wife or girl friend (*Woman on the Run*, *Phantom Lady*). Given the nature of the *noir* world, the attempt is seldom totally successful, and convoluted time structures, flashbacks and plots that emphasise action over rational development do nothing to help.

The Hemingway hero may withdraw to the sanctuary of the country or a café; or he may lean heavily on the ritualistic aspects of sport or art as a way of assuaging his pain and finding some order in his life. The *noir* hero does likewise, but he has far fewer resources to work with. There is no 'country' left†, only the modern wasteland of such

cities as New York, San Francisco and Los Angeles. And art is no longer redemptive: it is a measure of the decadence and avariciousness of the rich (*Laura*, *The Dark Corner*), or an affectation of refinement on the part of syndicate chiefs (*The Chase*, *The Big Heat*) or the criminally insane (*The Unsuspected*, *Crack Up*). In any case, its healing powers are lost to artist (*Phantom Lady*, *The Two Mrs. Carralls*) and detective (*The Big Sleep*, *Kiss Me Deadly*) alike. There are still a few restorative rituals remaining to the *film noir* hero, in particular the private eye: sometimes they are little things like rolling a cigarette (Spade) or pouring and downing a drink (Marlowe); sometimes bigger, like taking a beating or facing death. And in the hands of actors endowed with a special grace (a Humphrey Bogart or Dick Powell), such ceremonies as smoking or drinking take on sacramental overtones.

The only sanctuary left for the hero is his spartan office or apartment room, and he goes back there for spiritual renewal just as surely as Nick Adams goes back to the country. This is why Sam Spade almost loses control when the police confront him in his own living quarters. When doomed men like Walter Neff in *Double Indemnity* (Fred MacMurray) or Al Roberts in *Detour* (Tom Neal) withdraw to a darkened office or a small diner, they are reminiscent of the older waiter in Hemingway's 'A Clean, Well-lighted Place'. They can use the quiet and solitude to try to order their lives (and note that Roberts does not want to talk or listen to the juke-box); they are like artists trying to carve an aesthetic order out of the diffuse materials of existence. And what they have created is quite temporary, no more than a 'momentary stay against confusion'.

Given a rather broad range of heroes and situations in the *film noir*, it is of course always dangerous to generalise. I have tried in this article to avoid the facile generalisation, to take note of exceptions where they exist, and above all to remain faithful to the essence of the *film noir*. The period of the *film noir* was an extremely important one in American film history and had a profound effect on the later evolution of American cinema. It is of course impossible to do it justice in an article of this length. My rather narrow intention here has been to indicate the necessity of a critical reappraisal, following a lead established some years ago by Paul Schrader in the hope of opening up an approach to the subject which would free us of some of the semantical entanglements of the past. ■

'A clean, well-lighted place': Marlowe (Dick Powell) in 'Farewell, My Lovely'



*Sartre's particular dualistic system divides the world into two spheres: the objective, which exists quite apart from our minds, he termed 'Being-in-itself'; the subjective, which is co-extensive with the realm of consciousness, he termed 'Being-for-itself'. It is the first that he found slightly repellent.

†There are a few instances in which *films noirs* were not set in a city. But even here the setting does not prove to be any more redemptive: it is a swamp in *Gun Crazy*, a French province seething with repressed passions in *So Dark the Night*, unregenerate or oppressive Mexican towns in *Ride the Pink Horse* and *Touch of Evil*.



'THEY LIVE BY NIGHT' BY DAYLIGHT

Peter Biskind

More nonsense has been written about Nicholas Ray than about any other director. Following in the footsteps of their barmy French predecessors, Godard ('the cinema is Nicholas Ray') and Luc Moullet (*Party Girl* gave him 'a glimpse of the kingdom of heaven'), enraptured American film buffs have received Ray's films like sacred revelation, venerated them like holy writ. His work has provoked his acolytes to strange flights of lyrical fancy. Michael Wilmington, for example, writes in *The Velvet Light Trap* that 'One finds in Ray's films tenderness, grace, a weird and intoxicating loneliness, poetry, and the fascination of the night.' George Morris discovers in a *Village Voice* article that 'Ray's films constitute one of the most agonisingly personal bodies of work in the American cinema.' Jonathan Rosenbaum (SIGHT AND SOUND) says of the opening of *They Live By Night*: 'Each element is intensely articulated, yet "distanced" into a sort of abstraction: the spatial-emotional continuity of the first shot set in relief by the underlining verbal montage that "explains" it, the speedy car turned into creeping insect by the deterministic overhead angles which circumscribe its apparent freedom, and the violence displaced by the cut to Bowie, bringing us full circle back to the romantic hero already condemned in the opening shot—a circle of pain defining the limits of Ray's universe.'

Misty-eyed Ray cultists get off to a fast start with *They Live By Night* (1947), a sentimentalised screen version of Edward Anderson's hard-edged novel *Thieves Like Us*. 'Already in this astonishing film,' writes one critic, 'Ray's style is as striking in its compactness and expressive *mise en scène*, as it is personal in its peculiar nervousness and integration to a decidedly modern, existential view of individual alienation and social determinants.'

They Live By Night is indeed a good place to begin a reevaluation of Ray, since it does provide a valuable introduction to his later work. It was produced in 1947 at RKO during the tenure of Dore Schary, as part of his effort to carry on the Popular Front traditions of the 1930s into the post-war

period with such films as Losey's *The Boy with Green Hair* and Dmytryk's *Crossfire*. Schary himself was shortly to draw back from these kinds of projects, when the House Committee on Un-American Activities blew the whistle on Hollywood. In 1948, Howard Hughes bought RKO; according to Ray, Hughes was reluctant to release *They Live By Night* because he felt its Depression flavour had been dated by the growing post-war prosperity. It was released in England, however, where it received glowing notices from critics like Gavin Lambert and Richard Winnington. The film finally opened in New York in 1949, a full two years after it was completed.

If *They Live By Night* seemed anachronistic to Howard Hughes at the time it was

made, what impresses one now are the striking differences in tone and nuance that set it off from a superficially similar film of the 1930s like Fritz Lang's *You Only Live Once*. While cast in a form typical of late 1940s film noir, *They Live By Night* is a genuinely transitional film, at once looking backwards to the 1930s and forward to the 1950s. A brief look at both *You Only Live Once* and Anderson's novel *Thieves Like Us*, on which Charles Schnee's script was based, will help sort out these elements.

You Only Live Once (1937), like *They Live By Night*, depicts the flight and death of a Bonnie and Clyde couple, Eddie Taylor (Henry Fonda) and Joan Graham (Sylvia Sydney). The film sentimentalises its outlaws and diffuses its attack by including all sectors of society under its barrage of righteous indignation. Nevertheless, in a series of venomous portraits of different social types, it takes aim at the arrogance of institutions and their servants, the power of the haves over the have-nots, which serves as a good substitute for a more pointed class analysis. The thesis of the film is simply that its hero, a 'three time loser', never had a chance. Released from prison with a letter from the warden, determined to marry and go straight, Eddie Taylor sustains a series of humiliating setbacks at the hands of a collection of hypocritical, smug and sanctimonious respectables, until he is finally framed and sentenced for a murder he didn't commit. Each of the sharply drawn figures that people the film, from the comical couple who turn Eddie and Joan out of their hotel on their wedding night, to the bullying truck dispatcher who fires Eddie from his



job, to the cops who would rather shoot him than take him alive, to the mob of good citizens crying for his blood, would rather see Eddie dead than 'rehabilitated'. The cynical newspaper editors of so many films of the 1930s are shown awaiting the verdict like vultures, concerned only with which of the three dummy front pages ('guilty', 'not guilty', 'hung jury') will be required.

One striking sequence dramatises the relation of wealth to power by depicting the delivery of money to a bank. This transaction occurs under the watchful eyes of a detachment of heavily armed guards, who prod a crowd of curious onlookers with the barrels of tommy-guns. In another scene, worthy of Eisenstein's *Strike*, Lang depicts the warden and his family consuming a large and tasty meal while calmly awaiting Eddie Taylor's execution. *You Only Live Once* goes so far as to mock the Hollywood *deus ex machina* happy ending, as Eddie's last minute reprieve only results in more killing, and portrays Eddie himself as gradually consumed by the flames of anger, bitterness and self-pity. Lang's expressive *mise en scène* plunges Eddie into a world of shadows which suggests a cosmic implacability larger and more universal than the specific instances of malice that the film particularises. Indeed, the ending makes it clear that for Eddie and Joan, life on earth is a vale of tears, and that happiness may be anticipated only in the hereafter.

Despite Lang's unrelenting attack on human callousness and institutional injustice, the very impulse to investigate the social sources of crime in the late 1930s can be regarded as a step backwards from the gangster cycle of the Depression era. As Andrew Bergman points out in *We're In the Money*, his study of films in the 1930s: 'The causes of crime were not elucidated in the early Thirties because there seemed little point to it. Crime was a life style, a way of existing in the world. It was a living. In 1930, its causes were no more at issue than the causes for doctors and musicians.' In the early years of the Depression, crime was a natural response to an economic system in disarray. It never occurred to the studios, nor their audiences, that criminal activity

needed an explanation. As the economy began to recover in the late 1930s, and the system regained some of its vitality and authority, crime increasingly came to be regarded as an aberration, a social problem requiring investigation. The liberal, post-war tendency to examine the environmental roots of criminal behaviour often had conservative implications, based as it was on the assumption that society as a whole was healthy.

They Live By Night represents one of the final attempts by a liberal director to anchor crime in a broad social milieu, before post-war prosperity and the predilection for psychoanalysis swept aside what were felt to be simplistic environmentalist theories of criminology. Ray has been highly praised for what Michael Wilmington calls his 'passionate portrayal of the individual's rebellion against injustice'; but the conservative thrust of the environmentalist approach is already quite prominent in Ray's first film.

The written prologue to *They Live By Night* states that 'this boy... and this girl... were never properly introduced to the world we live in...' What is implied is a secure vantage point in society as it is, from whose norms deviance must be defined as a 'problem'. From our secure position in 'the world we live in', we can lend them, those less fortunate than us, a helping hand. A vast distance has been traversed since the early 1930s, when Ray's Salvation Army goodwill towards, say, Little Caesar, would have seemed quite inappropriate. The sense of complacency behind his confident distinction between *us* and *them* would have been equally alien to the world of *You Only Live Once*, where Lang takes pains to implicate the audience in the death of Eddie Taylor with a subjective point of view shot through the sights of a cop's rifle.

Ray's approach to what have been called his 'beautiful delinquents' required that the energy and vitality which made the 1930s gangster an authentic, if oblique, vehicle of social malaise, be pared away so that the criminal could be portrayed as an apathetic victim. Lang's Eddie Taylor, who is actually

Left to right: Sylvia Sidney, Henry Fonda in 'You Only Live Once' (1937); Cathy O'Donnell, Farley Granger in "They Live By Night" (1947); Faye Dunaway, Warren Beatty in "Bonnie and Clyde" (1967)

more of a victim than Bowie (Eddie is framed, while Bowie is indeed guilty of murder), doesn't feel like one. He feels like a killer. The seething anger which Fonda lends to his characterisation (not unlike his later portrayal of Tom Joad in *Grapes of Wrath*) confers upon Eddie an authority that Bowie lacks. Farley Granger's Bowie feels like a victim even though he's guilty. He affects us by the poignancy of his yearnings, not by the intensity of his bitterness. With his fresh-washed face, his starry-eyed gaze, his love of babies and stray dogs, it is hard to imagine him swatting a fly, much less robbing a bank.

Ray's Bowie is an innocent, a noble savage, whose purity is grounded in his identification with the natural world. He admires the vast Mississippi, and remarks to Keechie: 'Some day I'd like to see all this country, its mountains, its rivers...' He is at home in the country, but ill at ease in the big city where he gets into a fight at a night-club and is run out of town by a local hood. Only in a city park can he enjoy a moment's respite from the chase.

The difference between Eddie Taylor and Bowie Bowers is not entirely due to the difference between Lang and Ray as *auteurs*. It is part and parcel of a general change which overtook Hollywood heroes of the late 1940s, especially in the liberal films, as the energy, drive and ambition of Thirties' males was transformed into the dogged quiescence of their *film noir* successors. Nevertheless, in choosing to cast Bowie in the diminished role of the victim, Ray makes a conscious choice to develop the soft side of *noir*; the innocence and pathos of his hero have more in common with the misunderstood adolescents of the 1950s, the Clifts, Deans and Perkins, than with the violent and passionate side of such *film noir* leads as Lancaster, Mitchum, Ryan and Garfield.

The transformation of hero into victim is

readily apparent from a comparison of Ray's Bowie with the Bowie of Anderson's *Thieves Like Us*. Anderson's Bowie, despite a streak of fatalism, displays a good deal more initiative, control over his own life and genuine pleasure in robbing banks. He tells Keechie: "I'm not sorry for anything I ever did in this world . . . I'm not sorry for one of those banks. The only regret I got is that I didn't get one hundred thousand instead of ten." And later, "I get a kick out of robbing banks. I don't mind admittin' it." Anderson's Bowie is not coerced into the second (Cedars) bank job as he is in the movie, but enters into it willingly: "I can use the money," Bowie said. "A man never knows when he's going to need money and plenty of it in this business."

In *They Live By Night*, Bowie is not only a victim, he is a quadruple victim—of society, circumstance, bad company and himself. From the very first reaction shot in which he uneasily watches Chicamaw (Howard Da Silva) beat up a farmer, or the following scene in which he accidentally twists his ankle, or the next one in which he mournfully peers out of the shadows through the cross-hatched lattice beneath the billboard where he is hiding, it is clear that Bowie is doomed. Although he decides to put his life of crime behind him, he is dragged back against his will by his fellow thieves who refuse to let him back out. Chicamaw appears suddenly at the Lambert Inn where Bowie and Keechie are holed up and breaks their bubble of bliss (Ray has him literally smash some Christmas tree decorations to underline this). Bowie depends on the paternal T-Dub (Jay C. Flippen) to understand that his love for Keechie has taken him away from the world of crime, but is rudely awakened by a slap in the face. Even the pivotal automobile accident is transformed to emphasise Bowie's victimisation. In the film, it is Chicamaw's frantic tailgating that makes Bowie, in the car ahead, reckless. In the book, Bowie alone is responsible for the crash.

As Bowie's innocence shades into naiveté, it becomes his undoing. He overvalues the male camaraderie he shares with T-Dub and Chicamaw, who are more interested in robbing banks than in fulfilling the paternal and fraternal roles thrust upon them by Bowie. His sins are the venial sins of callow youth; he is too trusting, too good-natured, too generous.

Ray particularises the ways in which Bowie becomes his own worst enemy, the ways in which others use him for their own purposes, the ways in which chance conspires with character to seal his fate. Presumably, when he is killed at the end of the film it is society's loss; and a society which has no room for the innocence he embodies, nor for the kind of love which exists between him and Keechie, is not a good one. Such a society reduces romance to the level of cheap commercialism (Hawkins' Grade B weddings) or makes use of genuine devotion for its own ends (Mattie's collusion with the police). If Bowie is a noble savage, identified with the simplicities of the natural world, we assume that his aspirations are defeated by the social institutions which surround him, what Michael Wilmington calls the 'entangling greed of society'. This is certainly the orthodox view of the film. Douglas Gomery has written (in *The*

Velvet Light Trap) that Bowie is 'the innocent victim of society's inhuman rules and conventions.' But in fact the film eliminates the social concerns of the novel and consequently not only fails to specify the ways in which society frustrates the individual, fails to identify the forces within society which are responsible for the fate of its victims, but suggests that society is *not* responsible for the kind of victimisation Bowie represents.

Anderson's *Thieves Like Us* contains repeated and occasionally extended denunciations of capitalism delivered by one character or another, so that the 'thieves like us' refrain becomes an accusation flung at society by its dispossessed. It becomes part of a radical critique of America. Bowie and his pals repeatedly stress that they only rob those who can afford it: "I never robbed nobody that couldn't stand to lose it," Bowie said. "Them bankers will tell you to help yourself. It's insured. It's them billionaires up in New York that lose it. Them capitalists."

In the film, on the other hand, the Zelton job, which occurs off camera, is rendered in terms of Bowie's brutal treatment of the friendly jeweller from whom he had earlier purchased a watch for Keechie. The sense of the scene is that bank robbery hurts the little man. It is he who gets his hand smashed and his face pushed, not the big bankers in New York. Anger directed outwards at society, which in Lang and Anderson is regarded as an authentic expression of social discontent, in Ray becomes inauthentic as it turns inwards upon Bowie, deforming his personality. Social violence becomes personal violence. Moreover, by making the Zelton jeweller the main victim of Bowie's violence, *They Live By Night* fails to question the ethical legitimacy of capitalism by making the equation between 'legal' and 'illegal' acquisition of wealth, between business and bank robbery. The 'thieves like us' formula merely serves as a rationalisation by which Hawkins, one of the film's least savoury figures, justifies his own exploitation of others. It is shorn of its subversive content and transformed into its opposite.

Hawkins (Ian Wolf), a shady marriage broker who performs quickie marriages and provides Bowie and Keechie with a hot car, is loosely based on Anderson's Hawkins, a cynical shyster lawyer given to lecturing on the social significance of crime and the evils of the capitalist system. This side of the character is dropped from the film, while the cynicism remains. In the face of Bowie's

'Chicamaw . . . breaks their bubble of bliss . . .'
(Farley Granger, Howard Da Silva)



obvious discomfort, Hawkins is moved to justify himself: 'I'm giving people what they want. Folks ought to have what they want, to my way of thinkin'—as long as they can pay for it.' Michael Wilmington points out that the script makes explicit what the film merely implies: 'To my way of thinkin',' Hawkins continues, 'every man's part thief.' But the film does not endorse Hawkins' jaundiced point of view. Rather, we are expected to share Bowie's disgust at the nickel and dime commercialism of the wedding ceremony, and see Hawkins' invocation of the 'thieves like us' formula as self-serving justification of his own venality. The tinsel trappings of Hawkins' ceremony—flashing neon sign, instant witnesses, canned music, bargain basement wedding rings—merely throw into relief the basic validity of the institution he debases. And when the chips are down, Hawkins' own behaviour refutes his dim view of humanity. He refuses to arrange Bowie and Keechie's escape to Mexico. He won't, as he says, sell hope when there isn't any. In other words, contrary to the novel, the point of the film is precisely that people are *not* all 'thieves like us'.

This rosy outlook is reflected in the film's portrait of society, both as a structure of institutions and a collection of individuals. Unlike the gargoyles presented in *You Only Live Once*, the analogous figures in *They Live By Night* are innocuous or comic.* Lang's cowardly hotel owner who evicts Eddie and Joan is matched by Ray's friendly eccentric who welcomes Bowie and Keechie to their rustic retreat, or the kindly landlady who later treats them to sweet potato pie. While Lang's police are bloodthirsty and trigger-happy, Ray's police are paternal and understanding men who present a reasonable case for informing, and readily admit that society is responsible for its own ills. The utopian aspirations of Bowie and Keechie for community and social wholeness are embodied in normal everyday life. The film cherishes the values of mainstream America; its pathos arises from Bowie and Keechie's failure to realise the simple pleasures we take for granted,

* Michael Wilmington in the article cited above argues that Bowie and Keechie's 'world is presented with lacerating irony: a gabby, meddling motel owner teaching his infant son Alvin the "tricks of the trade"; a black chanteuse, her hands sticky with dollar bills after cruising through the cabaret; an icy night club manager frisking Bowie in the gents' room and then tossing him out because well-known fugitives are "bad for business." "Lacerating irony" is hardly the phrase I would use to describe the portrayal of society in *They Live By Night*. For one thing, Wilmington neglects to mention all the positive characters: the likeable Zelton jeweller brutalised by Bowie, the avuncular police, the friendly landlady. Secondly, although Wilmington notices the sentimentalisation of 'normality', he underestimates its role. It is not merely Bowie and Keechie's subjective response to their exclusion, it actually exists. There is a world of normality, and it is basically a good one. The figures Wilmington cites as evidence of the film's irony don't bear him out. The chanteuse is black culture's counterpart to *film noir*. Her hard-knocks blues provides the choral accompaniment to the gritty adventures of many a private eye or returning veteran in the late 1940s. There is no evidence that the urban hood who runs Bowie out of town is the manager of the night club; even if he is, he is a thief, that is, part of the underworld like Chicamaw and T-Dub. Alvin and his dad are gentle caricatures.

like holding hands in the movies. They are trapped outside society, where there can be no life, only death. The fugitive couple repeatedly emphasise that they merely wish to be like everyone else. Keechie says: 'I thought maybe we'd be lucky... and after a while we'd go away and live like other people.' Bowie suggests they go out to eat in New Orleans. Keechie replies: 'With music and all that—just like other people?' Keechie thinks that eventually they'll get off, when 'they've proved they can live right, like other people.' Ray's outsiders want in—into the *Saturday Evening Post* America that lies just beyond their reach. How different from the energy with which the real rebels of the 1950s—Kerouac, Ginsberg and their friends—thumbed their noses at Mainstreet and passionately embraced life on the road.

The absence of any social analysis not only makes it impossible to dramatise concretely the destructive role of institutions and their human instruments, but leads inevitably to the opposite conclusion. It seems, finally, that Bowie is the victim of everything *but* society. He is trapped by his fellow thieves who won't let him go straight; he is blinded by his own naiveté; he is haunted by past mistakes whose consequences he is powerless to evade; he is the victim of bad luck.

The *film noir* format, with its emphasis on entrapment, victimisation, failure and inability to escape the past, is the perfect one to embody this attitude. Ray retains the 1930s liberal emotional commitment to the outcast, but the accompanying social criticism is supplanted by a romantic pessimism which reflects post-war disillusionment with 1930s confidence in social change and the perfectibility of human beings. It also reflects the growing influence of Freud on American culture, particularly his pessimistic *Civilisation and its Discontents*. Civilisation represses freedom and destroys innocence. No society, bourgeois or otherwise, can be arranged for the benefit of its members.

The failure of social criticism, in the presence of an emotional villainism, produces a curious world without villains and without conflict, a world of victims without crimes or criminals. If Bowie himself is innocent, and society is essentially blameless, no one and nothing can be held accountable for his plight. The anger that in films like *You Only Live Once* would ordinarily have been directed outwards no longer has a target. It therefore returns on the victim as a honeyed sentimentality that enables us to contemplate the destruction of the doomed couple with a sense of bitter-sweet resignation. The notion that society is basically anti-human coexists happily with the notion that society is, for all intents and purposes, basically sound.

Once away from the treacly centre of the film, free from the sticky sweetness of Bowie and Keechie, Ray's flair for creating sharply observed characters can assert itself. *They Live By Night* is peopled by an array of eccentric humours teetering on the brink of grotesquerie, but redeemed by the vehemence of their private obsessions. Chicamaw with his glass eye and barely suppressed hysteria; the motel owner and his son Alvin, who parrots his father's



Mattie (Helen Craig), the informer who betrays Bowie to the police

maxims in a high-pitched squeak; Mattie, played with bitter intensity by Helen Craig; the birdlike Hawkins and Keechie's drunken father, lend to the world of *They Live By Night* a Dickensian plenitude whose passing we mourn, perhaps, more than Bowie's.

If the sentimentalising of the rebel coupled with the atrophy of social criticism were heralds of a certain kind of 1950s liberalism, the restrictive perspective of the coming decade was evident in the conception of Keechie's role as well. In *film noir*, the American ambivalence towards success, among other factors, forced women to become the motive force behind the ruthless drive to the top formerly expressed by the male gangsters of the Thirties. In films like *Double Indemnity* (1944), *Mildred Pierce* (1945), *The Postman Always Rings Twice* (1946), and *Gun Crazy* (1949), it is the woman's ambitious itch for easy money that leads to the roller coaster of crime and killing. *They Live By Night* softens *la femme noire* and relegates her to a subsidiary role (Mattie, the informer; and even she is motivated by a desire to restore her family), while elevating the leading female character, Keechie (Cathy O'Donnell), to the eminence of a domestic deity, a position that women were to occupy throughout the 1950s. Keechie plays a conservative role, moderating Bowie's ambition (she warns him not to live his life too fast—later he will have an automobile accident), anchoring him in the family (Bowie: 'Being a father makes a man responsible, you know, Keechie?'), and

detaching him from the male world of crime (Keechie: 'It's me or them, Bowie'). As in Ray's later films, the function of women is to steady the erratic and potentially violent male.

The three women in the film, Keechie, Mattie and the blues singer (Marie Bryant), all embody, in one way or another, a reality principle which clashes with the romanticism of the males. Marie Bryant sings a song called 'Your Red Wagon', which was the working title of the film. Its lyrics ('Now you finally learned/That you get burned when you play with fire/Don't come running to me/You can't use me as your spare tyre') provide an ironic commentary on Bowie's fanciful plan to get a job with a mining company in Mexico which he expresses to Keechie during the song.

The stabilising function performed by the women requires them, like Mattie, to manifest a dogged devotion to their men. Keechie puts it this way: 'A woman only loves once. I guess a woman is sort of like a dog. A bad dog will take meat from anybody. But you just take a good dog... If his master dies, he won't take food from anybody... There was a man back home, and after he died, his dog wouldn't eat or drink. And he just died too.' The collective wisdom of the women, distilled in the line 'You get burned when you play with fire', becomes, ultimately, a conservative critique of Bowie's adolescent aspirations.

Mattie's domestic conservatism, on the other hand, goes too far, deteriorating into a

dubious collaboration with the police which the film treats with an inconclusive ambivalence. In 1947, informing was not yet the unambiguous virtue it was to become a few years later, in such films as *On the Waterfront* and *Pick-Up on South Street*. (Or the unambiguous vice it was to become twenty years later in Penn's *Bonnie and Clyde*.) The police present a persuasive case, arguing that the greater good of society outweighs Mattie's violence to her principles, but Mattie's husband is appalled, and Mattie herself is troubled by conscience. The snug alignment of private motive and public good engineered by the films of the 1950s had yet to take shape.

Films of the Fifties which followed the noir cycle offered new hope that the wartime aspirations dashed by the shock of re-entry into post-war America could be realised within the framework of existing social institutions, primarily the family, if ambitions were scaled down to manageable proportions. Such fulfilment is not yet possible in *They Live By Night*, but its future contours are fully visible. Ray's films frequently contain utopian interludes, fugitive moments of refuge from the world, often associated with fantasies of domesticity: the deserted mansion in *Rebel Without a Cause* where Jim and Judy are initiated into the rites of the family; the hideout behind the waterfall in *Johnny Guitar* where Johnny gets his first glimpse of Vienna in the kitchen; the family farm in *The Lusty Men*; the Swensen farm in *Run for Cover*; the city park in *Knock on Any Door*; the 'few weeks while she loved me' in *In a Lonely Place*. In *They Live By Night*, this charmed green world is identified with the Lambert Inn, where Bowie and Keechie take refuge in a pretence of normality. Like the utopian interlude between Dix Steele and Laurel Gray (*In a Lonely Place*), where day and night become confused, Bowie and Keechie live in a fragile world of personal time which has little relation to real time. As several critics have noticed, when Bowie presents Keechie with a gift watch purchased from the Zelton jeweller, she sets it to an arbitrary time which comes to suggest the freedom from the pedestrian laws of time and space which their love confers upon them. As their utopia disintegrates, they fall under the constraints of clock time. After the Zelton watch gives them away, the accelerated pace of the last quarter of the film is dictated by a pressing urgency—time is running out. Keechie is going to have a baby. The haven they finally reach, Mattie's motel, is a false one, a parody of the safety of the Lambert Inn.

The preparations for Christmas represent the most pathetic of their attempts to be like everybody else; the domestic intensity of this sequence suggests Ray's identification of utopia with marriage, home and family. The emphasis on marriage is considerably stronger in the film than in the book. Anderson's Bowie and Keechie never do get married; when Bowie proposes to Keechie, she casually replies: 'I don't know whether I would or not.' Nor does her pregnancy have the prominence it has in the film. Bowie doesn't know she is pregnant until the very end, when both Keechie and the baby are killed along with Bowie in the final hail of bullets. The fascination with domesticity pulls the film towards the

1950s with the suggestion that visionary aspirations can be satisfied within the confines of the nuclear family.

The transition to the 1950s is an easy one for Ray to make, especially in view of the strain of romantic philosophical idealism which undermines his social vision. Despite the environmentalist assumptions of *They Live By Night*, it is clear that Bowie's character has not been formed by the brutalising circumstances and associations of his youth, the 'deprived' childhood and broken family so often alluded to in the film. The sweetness and light which irradiate Farley Granger's physical presence provide visible evidence of the spiritual flame that burns within. The existence, and occasionally transforming power, of a realm of pure autonomous spirit is insisted on throughout the film. It is present in the contrast between the spirit of the marriage ceremony and the corrupt substance which Bowie and Keechie experience. It underlines Bowie's comment upon entering their drab honeymoon cabin: 'This is our honeymoon—it doesn't make any difference where we are.'

Although many Fifties liberals indulged in guarded good cheer when they looked around them and saw not Marxism but technology and psychiatry apparently resolving the decade's most pressing problems, they often adopted an attitude of pessimism when they looked backwards at what they felt to be the mindless optimism of the 1930s. Hence, Ray's next few films are genuinely dark; the feeble environmentalism of *They Live By Night* gives way to films like *Knock on Any Door* and *On Dangerous Ground*, where the drab and violent urban environment does indeed leave its mark. Nick Romano is guilty (John Derek has a nastiness that Granger lacks, but even he feels like a victim); corruption exists both without and within the self. By the time we get to *In a Lonely Place* in 1950, the locus of violence is entirely within the self. The environmentalism of the earlier films has given way to a psychological model of human behaviour. Dix Steele's war experiences are alluded to, but are hardly given sufficient weight to provide a convincing context for his disorderly behaviour, nor are they meant to. He is a neurotic, and we must leave it at that.

Although the Fifties approach to social problems which rooted them within the self or in the immediate family group ultimately contradicted and supplanted environmentalism, it was in many ways merely a logical extension of environmentalism. If milieu actually does infect the moral tissue of its victims, it is logical that this infection be expressed by psychological 'maladjustment'. Once social problems are securely located within the self, however, the governing vision of Ray's films becomes not only psychological and subjective, but anthropocentric. The real world becomes dematerialised, becomes a mere manifestation of the self, while the style of the films themselves becomes increasingly expressive. *Johnny Guitar* is the most fully realised example of this expressionist tendency. To mention only one instance of many, the historical significance of the blasting of the rocky mountainscape (making way for the railroad) is overwhelmed by the psychological symbolism of the scene. It becomes an

emblem of the explosive charges buried within the psyches of Emma and Vienna.

As environment is subordinated to psychology, and reality becomes an expression of self, physical wounds, once visible evidence of society's mark upon the individual, become symbolic of personal culpability or human limitation in general, and therefore can no longer serve as a pretext for rebellion. Although Davey Bishop (John Derek) in *Run for Cover* (1954) and Tommy Farrell (Robert Taylor) in *Party Girl* (1958) have suffered serious leg injuries, they are expected to swallow their bitterness and shape up. Tommy's injury is corrected by an operation as soon as he falls in love with Cyd Charisse, whose leggy pulchritude provides an inspiration. Wounds, by the mid-1950s, are not real; they are mere rationalisations for moral weakness. Matt Dow (James Cagney) in *Run for Cover* puts the onus on Davey Bishop, not on the audience as Andrew Morton (Humphrey Bogart) had done six years earlier in a similar situation in *Knock on Any Door*. In 1948, Ray's Morton lectures the judge about the victim: 'Nick's guilty of knowing his father died in prison, of living in poverty, of having been reared in the slums... he's guilty of the foul treatment of a primitive reform school... this boy could be a student instead of a savage... Come with Nick along Skid Row... past the drunks and panhandlers and prostitutes in the poolrooms and bars... Yes, Nick Romano is guilty, but so are we, and so is... society... We're scandalised by environment and call it crime... Knock on any door and you may find Nick Romano... We good people in this community... if he dies in the electric chair... we killed him...'

By 1954, there were no victims. Victims, like the Hollywood Ten and countless other casualties of the witch-hunt, were characteristically held responsible for their own misfortunes. Ray's Matt Dow drives the lesson home to Davey Bishop, yesterday's rebel, now a chronic cry-baby: 'Why don't you stop being sorry for yourself? You think you're the only one in the world who ever got a raw deal... There's a lot of people in this world who've had a tougher time than either you or me. It comes with the ticket—nobody guarantees you a free ride. The only difference is—most people don't run for cover. They keep right on going, picking up the pieces the best way they can. But you never hear them. The ones who can't take it like you—the ones who're lookin' for the free ride—who cause all the trouble everywhere.'

The creeping idealism evident in Ray's mature work impoverishes the real world and, like most varieties of subjectivism, when translated into political terms, amounts to an endorsement of the status quo, the as-is. Thus Ray, confronted with the liberal line on his films from *Movie* interviewers in 1963 ('One constant theme in all your films seems to be a man alone against society that is trying to crush him'), paraphrases Matt Dow: 'I do not feel that [one of the constant themes in my work] is man against society that is trying to crush him. That would be indulging in self-pity, and it is man's responsibility to himself to adjust to the world around him.'

In The Picture

Arena Cinema

Gavin Millar is producer of the new BBC-2 series 'Arena Cinema'

Covering the cinema for BBC Television is no way to make friends. A letter we got recently from the Independent Film-Makers Association outlined plans for a representative introduction to their work, to be transmitted by BBC-2. It suggested a series of twelve or thirteen two-hour shows. If we are lucky, *Arena Cinema* will have thirteen half-hours to play with on alternate Wednesdays from late September to the end of March 1977. It must be a great relief to the Controller BBC-2 to know that the IFA can fill his cinema arts slot through to Christmas 1980, if the need arises.

While David Cheshire and Rosemary Bowen-Jones, my colleagues on *Arena Cinema*, and I bow our heads to the charge that we shall basically be failing totally to de-mystify the prevailing bourgeois capitalist narrative ideology by suppressing these twenty-six hours of film, let us assure those to whom it is of any comfort that we shall be receiving, at the same time, a series of swift, compensatory uppercuts from Wardour Street publicists for doing the opposite.

Freed from the necessity of checking through the current releases, a task performed by Barry Norman on BBC-1's *Film 76*, we may be able to spread ourselves a little. This of course is usually of little interest to the major distributors, who are more concerned that you should plug—and not just publicise—only the latest release. Talking to the manager of an independent Hertfordshire cinema a few weeks ago, I asked how they chose their programme. Sometimes, he said, we get really old films—really old—and they go down pretty well. How old did he mean? Oh, up to ten years old. He was not a junior manager. He had started as a page boy in the same chain—then 18 cinemas strong—before the war. Now he was manager of the only survivor. I sometimes think the distribution and exhibition side of the business neglect their historical sense at their peril.

You could also say that they were always fighting a losing battle

against television. So what are we doing on *Arena Cinema*? Publicising and propping up a failing industry? Or muscling in cheaply on its expensive product? According to where you're standing, I suppose, both. What we hope to do on the programme is convey enthusiasms. In the nature of things—see above—they have to be ours. It doesn't much matter whether we seem to be supporting television at the expense of the cinema or vice versa. Our influence would be negligible, and in any case the pattern of interdependence between television and the cinema is bound to be transformed soon enough by other forces both technological and financial. But the enthusiasm is bound, in the nature of things, to have a historical perspective, and that's where you run into trouble. When I asked a few people what kind of programme they would like to see they all cried out for more clips, less chat. But if it isn't this week's film you're illustrating, then it's only the courtesy of the distributor that lets you show it at less than the official rate of about £3 a foot or £280 a minute. Add that up over 30 minutes and you have an expensive show.

David Cheshire and I recently made an *Omnibus* film about Jacques Tati. It took months of wooing the *maître* to get him to the point of agreeing to let us eulogise him, months more to get the clips we wanted (or at any rate half of them), weeks and weeks to edit the material. The financial negotiations involving the staff of BBC Purchased Programmes Department were just as complicated and nerve-wracking. Tufts of hair lie about on both sides of the Channel. The point is, the programme was more or less successful, and it couldn't afford less time or care. Admittedly it was twice as long as *Arena Cinema* will be, but can we give each half-hour that sort of attention? Anything less runs the familiar risk of 'triviality' which a lot of people who refuse to watch television accuse it of.

On the other hand, arts programmes are often accused of being a bit up-market and ivory tower. The accusers, a negligible clutch of malcontents, can turn out to comprise 90 per cent of our audience if we simply address our-

selves to those in the know. On BBC-2 you can certainly aim at an audience at least ten times, to put it modestly, the readership of SIGHT AND SOUND. Some kinds of special knowledge can't be assumed.

What will *Arena Cinema* be like then? Dangerous question two months before we start, but amongst its enthusiasms is likely to be a pleasure in the cinema of the recent past—that's to say, up to 75 years ago. If we can get the clips. We've already shot a long interview with Altman. We'd love to do something about Resnais' collaboration with David Mercer and so would he, except that he courteously agreed to do it the other day so long as we wouldn't film him talking to us, and recorded it in French. Who volunteers to explain to Controller BBC-2 why we're listening to the dubbed voice of a man who isn't there? There must be an answer. I just hope it isn't somewhere in a Rivette film nobody has ever seen.

GAVIN MILLAR

Painting with Light

In black and white, James Wong Howe was unsurpassed among Hollywood cameramen; in colour, one of the half-dozen finest stylists. Wong Howe died last July at the age of 76, and like so many of the Hollywood veterans kept working into his seventies; his final credit was for last year's *Funny Lady*. Like many of the pioneers, he had a bizarrely varied apprenticeship. Born in Canton, he was the son of a storekeeper who brought his family to America in 1904 when

Wong Howe was five. Teenage experiments with a camera were followed by periods as a boxer and flyer. Going to Los Angeles, he watched film crews at work and landed a job collecting bits of film from the cutting-room floor. Work as camera assistant and portrait photographer led to his doing some close-ups of stars including Mary Miles Minter, who offered him a job as her personal cameraman. His lighting skills first became evident on his films with Herbert Brenon, especially *Peter Pan* (1924).

The early 1930s saw him experimenting with ceilinged sets, wide-angle lenses, deep focus and other devices which were to contribute to his 'realistic' style, evidenced in *Transatlantic*, *The Power and the Glory* and the original *Walking Down Broadway*, before it was taken over and partially re-directed by Raoul Walsh. His mid-30s period with MGM was less experimental, with a preponderance of that 'white' lighting favoured by the studio (and discernible in the first *Thin Man*), contrasted later by the lushness of *The Prisoner of Zenda* and the colour effects—like the scene in the cave designed by another frequent collaborator, William Cameron Menzies—from *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*.

With the 1940s and his contract with Warner Brothers, Wong Howe entered his busiest and arguably greatest period. His atmospheric, heavily shadowed style admirably suited the moody Warners subjects of the time, and the images remain as potent as ever—the grimy town in *King's Row*; the early morning island-hopping from *Air Force*; *Passage to*

Laurence Olivier plays a former Nazi in John Schlesinger's 'Marathon Man', a thriller written by William Goldman



Marseilles, with its steaming studio jungle; the quasi-documentary shooting in *Objective, Burma!*; and the dusty streets and sinister night vistas of *Pursued*.

After colour became general in the 1950s, Wong Howe alternated between the two forms, clearly rejoicing in a real black-and-white subject like *Sweet Smell of Success*, with its famous shining city streets, as well as in the bright, fantasy colours of *Bell, Book and Candle*. More black-and-white with the Martin Ritt films (*Hud*, *The Outrage*); and then a final period comprising a masterly amalgam of textures and shades in *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter* and *The Molly Maguires*, whose muted colour effects below ground were achieved by the use of tiny quartz lights.

Wong Howe developed a marvellous feeling for the kind of story he was helping to tell, lightening and deepening the narrative as required. Often a difficult man on the set, who seemed to relish a row and a fight, he could also be considerate to younger colleagues. Lighting cameraman Wilkie Cooper, who in the mid-30s was operator on three of Wong Howe's British films (*Fire Over England*, *Under the Red Robe*, *Farwell Again*), told me that Wong Howe was his main teacher. 'He was very demanding and accurate and he was, of course, years ahead of his time. He wouldn't have put up with the shoddy stuff you see in films and TV today (I remember he had a terrible argument with Korda over using a new lab); he was moody and often slow, but look at the results he achieved. I think I was the only operator who managed to last three films with him, and at the end of the third he called me to him and asked if I would like to learn the secret of it all. I was only 18 and very eager, and really felt this was the moment I had been waiting for. But Jimmy just smiled and said, "The secret is always to get the job."'

JOHN GILLET

Antonioni Down Under

Michelangelo Antonioni was in Australia last June, taking part with other Italian film people in a 'Salute to Italian Cinema' which we had organised within the framework of the Sydney and Melbourne film festivals. No film of Antonioni's was running, but in Melbourne a short retrospective had been arranged. He stayed only a few days, was duly lionised by the press (and even managed to antagonise some of its members), and fitted in a lightning visit to the Sydney Opera House, a state luncheon with the premier of New South Wales and a trip to Sydney Harbour to see if it would serve as the backdrop for a film.

Antonioni was hoping to set up a film in Australia and trusting reports that government monies might be made available to 'worthwhile' film projects by foreign companies. He went to research some sites, but not many: no one

could put at his disposal the helicopter he considered necessary. Coffs Harbour, the town along Australia's Eastern Coast where the story upon which his script is based actually happened, is a long day's drive from either Sydney or Brisbane. Antonioni never saw Coffs Harbour.

His project tells the story of four men in a boat, and is based on a newspaper report which he happened on by chance. A man in the middle of life, say a Sydney businessman, suddenly restless and self-doubting, takes off on his yacht with a crew of three hazardingly recruited sea bums; a storm hits, and when the boat is found and towed in after days of drifting, its owner is missing. Antonioni, in his film treatment, imagines what happened to him and contemplates the reasons for his *malaise*. In this version, the anti-hero was only hiding out on board, probably because the adventure would allow him to disappear. The end shot—as always in Antonioni's films, an elaborate one—reveals him walking at night, in the rain, along the deserted jetty of the fishing port where the boat has been berthed, and coming upon an empty parked car whose windscreen wipers are idly functioning.

There is a photograph which was published in the Milan newspaper *Corriere della Sera* and which shows the three men in their tattered rags, as they appear when the boat is found. They are the story's real protagonists;

they provide the action. They claim to have been threatened by the boat's owner on the high seas and imprisoned in the hold. When they break out, they claim, he has gone.

One of them, an older man with long white hair, is the leader, and in Antonioni's treatment clearly intended as the counterpart to the yacht owner. The latter seems to attempt to solve his identity crisis by jettisoning—like the hero of *The Passenger*—his society's view of him, his image. The old cowboy of the seas has chosen an egotistical solution as a survivor, totally self-involved, riding out the resistance of the weak. When I show the clipping with the photograph to Antonioni, he looks at me with anticipation. I look again at the picture, and again at him. Suddenly I realise that the grey-haired man in the photograph is Antonioni himself. It is a picture he had staged with the aid of a photographer.

Two days later, while seeing Antonioni off at Sydney airport, I learn that the Australian Film Commission has turned down his project. The 4½-million dollar budget (with over a million calculated for Gene Hackman's participation) is way beyond the cost of films made in Australia, even given the current renaissance of film-making there. Antonioni is adamant: 'The Australians will have to learn,' he says, 'that if you want to make world calibre films, you have to spend money.'

GIDEON BACHMANN

James Wong Howe on the set of 'This Property is Condemned' (1966)



Mr. and Mrs. Hitchcock

Alfred Hitchcock vetoed my first request to interview his wife, Alma Reville, who has been his closest collaborator and adviser since they worked on Graham Cutts' *Woman to Woman* in 1922. My opportunity came at a party in the Hitchcocks' favourite Los Angeles restaurant, Chasen's, where they dine each Tuesday and Thursday night under a framed portrait of their daughter Patricia. Mrs. Hitchcock, encountered apart from her husband for a rare few moments, agreed with alacrity to my request and stood by my side when I again put the question to Hitchcock. He agreed; and Mrs. Hitchcock, a delightful lady who combines the savvy of an old cinema pro with the ever fresh giggle of a London schoolgirl who liked Mary Pickford best because they both had long curls, has quite a tale to tell.

Alma came from a middle-class suburban family—her father was London representative of a Nottingham lace firm—and was educated at a girls' private school. Her mother used to take her to the cinema, over the objections of a pious aunt who would say, 'Oh, you shouldn't take Alma there—she'll only pick up fleas.' The London Film Company was only ten minutes from the Revilles' home, and Alma would cycle over to watch the actors arrive for work; her father found her a job there through a neighbour, and at 16 she went into the cutting room 'because it was the only place where it would be possible to work without any experience.' She entered the film business with four years' start on her future husband, who was born a day before Alma in 1899.

'There were no editors in those days; nobody would take over like they do today. The directors all cut their own movies with assistance from the people in the cutting room.' When the Americans who had been using the studio went back to the U.S., it became a rental facility and Alma was asked to become a continuity girl: 'It sounded a little nicer, but I hadn't the faintest idea what that was. I hadn't a clue. So I said yes.' Still working as a cutter while handling script-girl functions (at that time, she says, she was unique in combining both duties), Alma had the bad luck to be assigned a costume picture for her first dual job. 'When I saw the picture put together, I had made so many mistakes with their clothes. Here this girl would come into the hallway with mittens on, and would go into the other room and she wouldn't have the mittens on, and the other way when she left. It was a wonder I wasn't thrown out!'

Her father's friend went to work at Famous Players-Lasky, and Alma followed; her first assignment was on Donald Crisp's *Keeping Up Appearances*. It was there that she met Hitchcock. 'I remember a young man coming in with a large package under his arm,

and wearing a rather draggy grey top-coat.' She chuckles at the memory.

The Hitchcocks knew each other for several years before they married, and spent most of their free time talking about movies. 'Still do,' she adds. *Woman to Woman*, made at UFA Studios in Berlin, was the first of five films they both worked on with Cutts as director. Alma remembers the first one as a particularly rough experience because Cutts 'wasn't really a pleasant man; he knew very little, so we literally carried him.' But the Hitchcocks were fascinated by the workings of UFA, and Alma thinks the experience had a 'tremendous' effect on his later work. She doesn't recall watching Murnau directing *Der Letzte Mann* there, but Hitchcock says emphatically, 'I do.'

Hitchcock's first completed film as director was *The Pleasure Garden*, made in Munich in 1924 with Alma assisting. After every shot, he would turn to her and ask, 'Was that all right?' From *The Pleasure Garden* to *Family Plot*, more than 50 films, and Alma worked behind the scenes on all of them, initially as script girl and assistant director, later as occasional scriptwriter, and eventually as 'Hitch's critic', the role she fills today. 'Maybe I'm his severest critic, you know.' Alma's last screen credit was for screenplay adaptation on *Stage Fright* in 1950; her previous credits also include a few scripts for other directors, such as Adrian Brunel's *The Constant Nymph*, Henrik Galeen's *After the Verdict* and Richard Wallace's *It's in the Bag*. Hitchcock screenplays for which she shares screen credit include *The Thirty-Nine Steps*, *Sabotage*, *Suspicion* and *Shadow of a Doubt*. On the latter, the favourite film of both Mr. and Mrs. Hitchcock, Alma's job was to take Thornton Wilder's novelistic script and break it down into cinematic form; then Sally Benson was brought in to 'spice it up' with modern slang and humour, Hitchcock says.

Asked what contributions his wife has made to his work, Hitchcock replied without prompting, 'Well, she's a critic.' A severe one? 'Of course—nothing to soft-pedal, you know.' Hitchcock consults Alma when he is making the crucial choice of material, and she reads the scripts and offers suggestions. 'I think for a normal person to read one of Hitch's scripts must be very difficult because they're so visual. People read the lines and they don't visualise it. Well, I'm the opposite. I have too much of a visual mind. When I read books now it takes me forever, that's why they're all piled up. I just can't help it with that background. When I read his scripts, I automatically visualise it as he has done and how he wants it to be. He always wants me to go and see the first week's shooting just to see if the characters are coming across, and so I always do that.' After the first week, she watches rushes occasionally, but



The Hitchcocks in the 1930s, out with Madeleine Carroll

seldom returns to the set. 'I don't think it's right. I hate to have people think I'm butting in.'

The Hitchcocks in conversation often complete each other's thoughts, speaking in the elliptical manner one notes in couples of long duration, and their views on film-making are virtually identical. At times one can discern a fruitful kind of friction passing between them, as Alma interrupts one of Hitchcock's professorial monologues to interject her own peppery opinions, or when Hitchcock sits broodingly while she talks about something which doesn't concern him. In any case, it is evident that here is a relationship which has lost none of its vigour and energy and deep mutual dependence over five decades.

After Hitchcock had the operation in which he was fitted with a pace-maker, which he blamed on the long ordeal of preparing the script for *Family Plot*, Alma told me with a mixture of pride and ferocity, 'Nothing will ever stop Hitch.' Not if Alma has anything to say about it.

JOSEPH MCBRIDE

Hungary in Crisis

By the end of 1975, the continuing crisis in the Hungarian film industry had become obvious even to the establishment; the national film week, held approximately every two years at Pecs, was shorn of festival-like trimmings last January, and weighed down by debates on the problems of the Hungarian film and its dwindling audiences. (See David Robinson, *Hungarian Notes*, SIGHT AND SOUND, Winter 1974/75.) Though

the drift to television is usually blamed for empty cinemas, the distribution network also has much to answer for. Publicity is both confusing and meagre, and even in Budapest cinemas range from the spartan to the squalid, with worn-out projectors, pock-marked screens and creaking wooden seats.

The 1975 output of twenty-two films was an odd mixture of six films from new directors, artistic films by Ranódy, Gyöngyössi and Maár and lightweight entertainments designed to compete with TV and imports. A sense of crisis was made more poignant by this shortage of films from the established directors.

Six first films by new directors would be a cause for rejoicing, if they were all as original and challenging as István Dárday's *Holiday in Britain*, which had already won the main prize at Mannheim and the Hungarian critics' prize for the best film. Dárday is no solitary *auteur*: part of his originality is in appreciating the talents of his team of equals, who first came together while still at the Film School.

Holiday in Britain is a quasi-documentary based on an incident reported in the press: a teenage boy was chosen by the Young Pioneers to join a group travelling to England for a month, but his parents refused to let him go. The Dárday team searched other parts of the country for locations and protagonists similar in background and attitudes to the peasant family, the Pioneer leaders and village notables. With the broad outline of a script, at each day's shooting they half wrote, half improvised dialogue for the amateur cast. The original story was reconstructed with slight distortions

which brought out the comedy in humdrum situations, stressing the cultural gap between the administrators and the people, in whose name they rule. Inevitably the Young Pioneer organisers attacked the film, calling the case untypical and the satire unfair.

After *Holiday in Britain* was shown, the team returned to the original village for interviews with the family about the film, and to assess the state of mind of the boy and his would-be patrons a year after their disappointment. The resulting film, directed by Györgyi Szalay, Dárday's wife and co-director, is *The Natural History of an Untypical Case*, an uncompromising documentary which highlights the satirical abstraction of the feature film.

The Dárday film is not alone in the documentary field. Judit Elek also won a prize at Mannheim with her second report on two girls in a small Hungarian village, called *A Simple Story*. János Rózsa, whose two features (*Grimaces*, *Dreaming Youth*) were almost formally aesthetic, has likewise made two documentaries, both about schoolteachers, with such objectivity that the one is hard to find and the other withdrawn even from institutional or private screenings. There are several other directors as well, enough to look like a movement, reflecting the world-wide trend which has grown from Direct Cinema to the mammoth works of Wiseman, aiming to use film not for creative self-expression but as a lever for social change. Not all their films are screened; there is always the question of how can documentaries depict social problems within a system which claims to have abolished social problems.

Documentary details can even slow down the release of a feature film. For instance, Hungarians have not yet seen Géza Böszörményi's 60-minute *The Last Dancing Master*. In this delicate comedy, busloads of actual (and unsuspecting) tourists are cut into a fictional story of old-fashioned village dances losing out to pop groups. This film was produced in conjunction with a West German television company, but Hungarian television likewise makes hour-long features with established film directors like István Szabó or István Gaál, showing that when audiences switch to the box, film-makers must follow. There have also been two or three probing or critical documentaries on TV, like László B. Révész's *Celebration*, about a working-class wedding which cost a largish fortune in entertainment, presents and the ritual payment for the 'bridal dance'. It implies the questions: where does all the money come from, and where does so much conspicuous consumption lead? The first remains a mystery, and the answer to the second is sprung at the end of the film. Even before the footage was edited, within eight months of their ostentatious wedding, the young couple were divorced.

The documentary influence may

lead to films in a minor key, in sharp contrast to the epics of the 1960s like *The Round-Up* or *Cold Days*, but if allowed free growth it could still revitalise the Hungarian cinema. It even influenced Ferenc Grunwalsky's *Requiem for a Revolutionary*, a studiously abstract and black and white treatment of a national legend, which could yet win some festival prizes for Hungary. Another first film, László Lugossy's *Identification*, would be good in any year, but in 1976 it seemed almost the best. A young soldier fights a stubborn battle with the ad hoc authorities of 1945 to regain his own name after a mistake in a prisoner of war camp. Uneducated, inarticulate, he has difficulties in formulating even the idea of identity, bringing a new, perhaps Pinteresque flavour to an unexpected setting. 'Honest' and 'decent' have dominated critical evaluations of *Identification*; and Péter Rényi, who is President of the Film Council as well as assistant editor and critic of the Party newspaper, took exception to such criteria (*Kritika*, April 1976) as implying a lack of honesty in other new Hungarian films. Quite.

Meanwhile István Dárday has already found a perfect amateur cast for his second feature film; Zoltán Huszárik is preparing a biography of the mad painter genius Csontvary; Gaál is working on an emotionally and intellectually demanding novel by Magda Szabó, and István Szabó has finished shooting his most surrealist, poetic script since the short *Dream of a House*, under the working title of *Tales from Budapest*.

MARI KUTTNA

Ottawa 1976

In five months leading up to August, Ottawa miraculously put together an international animation festival which not merely filled the gap left this year at

Annecy and Zagreb but surpassed them both in the quality and intelligence of its programming, lavish documentation and the responsiveness of its audience. Nor was this triumph confined to the main festival. Three hundred attended workshop sessions every day to learn from Lotte Reiniger, Norman McLaren, Grant Munro, Peter Foldes, Ryan Larkin, Caroline Leaf, Derek Lamb, Co Hoedeman, Jules Engel, Tissa David and others, and to shoot on super 8, 16mm and video tape with full facilities to edit and screen the results—an innovation which must surely become a part of every future animation festival.

Side events included admirable retrospectives of Oscar Fischinger and the National Film Board of Canada, André Martin's splendidly subversive rediscovery of Raoul Barré, a programme on collage and cut-out animation, a seminar on the future of animation, and the world première of Bruno Bozzetto's *Allegro non Troppo*, a boisterous and brilliantly animated parody of *Fantasia* bubbling with ideas.

For the first time, the fact that the host country carried off most of the awards (like the French at Annecy and the Yugoslavs at Zagreb) seemed wholly justified. Caroline Leaf won the Grand Prix for *The Street* and the top prize in the children's section for her exquisite sand animation *The Owl Who Married a Goose*, emerging as the most innovatory of the younger animators in the NFB's gifted team. *The Street*, adapted from a Mordecai Richler story, recreates the narrator's childhood during the long death of his grandmother. The audacity of tackling a narrative which apparently could be handled live is justified by a unique and dazzlingly successful technique of swooping through time and space to link scenes in a manner which no camera or editor could hope to achieve in live action. This black comedy of

Jewish nostalgia is an immediate landmark in animation, giving the possibilities of the medium even more limitless horizons.

Again and again the freshest and most vigorous animation proved to be the work of women. Joan Freeman's *Toilette*, winner of the award for the best first work, makes devastating use of clay animation to portray a woman's indecision about the shape to show, the dress to wear, the face to present, before deciding that it is best, after all, to go back to bed. Barbara Bottner's *Later That Night* shows a girl's wistful fantasy of substituting muscles for breasts, flexing rather than flaunting, a gem of wishful thinking that won rapturous applause. Lynn Smith's *Teacher Lester Bit Me*, made for the NFB, uses crisp cut-out animation to show a teacher coping with an exhausting day care class of infants and won the award for the best instructional film; and 77-year-old Lotte Reiniger's *Aucassin and Nicolette*—yet another NFB triumph—won her a special homage from the jury.

Sadly, most established British animators seem to have been shy of entering Ottawa, and the flag was flown by proxy with a hastily assembled and highly successful out-of-competition show called Great British Films, including Bob Godfrey's *Great*, Derek Phillips' *Bigger Is Better*, Antoinette Starkiewicz's *Puttin' on the Ritz*, Geoff Dunbar's *Lautrec*, Alison DeVere's *Café Bar* and Ted Rockley's *Way Out*. All were eligible for the festival, but not one had been entered. Britain's only award was won by a Tic Tac commercial directed by Richard Purdum and produced by Richard Williams Animation; but a decided impact was made by *All Sorts of Heroes* by Rick Megginson and Steve Hughes, a splendidly bizarre puppet film somewhere between *King Kong* and *Clockwork Orange* about a ferret-faced winged hero who stamps out his frog-like tormentors with a massive robot.

With Ottawa 79 already planned, Annecy 77 and Zagreb 78 are acutely aware of the standard they now have to meet.

DEREK HILL

Fritz Lang, 1890-1976

The image of Fritz Lang created by the various interpretations of his films as well as by production gossip was that of a dour and tyrannical pessimist. The reality could not have been more different. To those who knew him, Lang was a generous friend, an immensely intelligent companion with a highly developed sense of ironic humour not only about life in general but, above all, about himself and his work.

He was particularly fond of and sensitive to questing youth. Once, at a reception after a college lecture, a student expressed surprise that Lang had made two films in India. Lang laughed and said, 'What! You don't know every

frame of every film made by the great director, Fritz Lang?' When he saw that the student had taken this in the wrong way, not realising that he was being teased with a joke directed as much at Lang's own public persona as at himself, Lang led him off alone to a corner of the room where he patiently answered endless questions about the special effects in *Metropolis*—one subject Lang usually refused to discuss.

He also loved to play games with worshippers at the altar of auteurism. Late one afternoon, after I had seen *Liliom* for the first time, I went to his house for drinks. As I walked in, Lang greeted me with 'Well, how did you like *Liliom*? Never mind, you always think everything I made is a masterpiece.' Walking cheerfully into the trap he had set, I replied: 'Not at all, Fritz. There are a few films I don't like at all.' The trap sprung: 'Oh? Which ones?' Seeing what I thought to be a way out, I chose a film I knew he himself didn't particularly like: 'Well, I am not too fond of *An American Guerrilla in the Philippines*.' Slowly pouring himself one of those infinitely dry martinis of which he was so justly proud, with a wicked twinkle he answered, 'I can't recall ever making a film with that title. I probably didn't. It wouldn't fit into the concept of "Fritz Lang's world vision", you know.'

Still, though he would mock over-zealous critical interpretations of his films, it was obvious that he took them quite seriously, and would allow absolutely no foolishness in conversation about them. Mentioning the similarities of theme between *Scarlet Street* and Buster Keaton's *Cops*, I found myself challenged to prove it. After locating a projector and a print of *Cops*, we watched the film together, after which, with a seemingly non-committal grunt, he said, 'Yes, I see what you mean.' That was the extent of his comment, but one could see he was really rather pleased, for Keaton was one of the few directors whom he held in great and unreserved esteem, perhaps because they both took the same ceaseless care with structure and detail.

He was less willing to talk about directors whose work he did not admire, for he felt that it was not his place to discuss his colleagues critically. He held very definite, meticulously clarified views about films of other directors, for he did go to see films with some regularity—less towards the end of his life as his eyesight dimmed. If one had the courage (and the temerity) to persist, he would sometimes consent to talk briefly and with exquisite logic about films and directors he did not care for. Those opinions were, however, intensely private; if he found a film which pleased him, he was far more public in his recommendation. He sent friends off, for example, to see not only *Klute* but Vadim's greatly underrated *Pretty Maids All in a Row* as well.

On the other hand, he thought that too many of his friends were





Fritz Lang on a visit to the National Film Theatre

film-obsessed. He much preferred to discuss world events. An avid reader of numerous international newspapers, he would analyse in detail the relationship of one event to another and place everything in the context of the currents of history. He regarded the activities of political leaders with a cold and penetrating eye, often worrying about what he concluded was an historical trend that favoured the forces of reaction, seeing many similarities between today's world and that of the Weimar Republic. He was also given to leading one into a discussion, say, of capital punishment—a subject he had, after all, treated in a number of films from *M* to *Beyond a Reasonable Doubt*—towards what seemed a reasonably logical conclusion, only to overturn his own conclusion and begin again relentlessly. He believed that one never reached the 'truth' about anything.

He also believed (no doubt rightly) that movie people spend too much time in the dark. He always insisted, therefore, that visitors travel with him down the coast from Los Angeles to Marineland for sunshine and the fresh sea air. That he himself was fond of the dolphins and penguins had much to do with his choice; as much, anyway, as the hillside proximity of a glass-walled Frank Lloyd Wright church which he especially admired. Reckoning with some amusement that too much sunlight all at once could be traumatic to the hyper-sensitive nervous systems of pallid cinema addicts, he would allow for a brief rest at a pre-ordained point to indicate the stretch of beach along which he had shot several sequences for *Moonfleet*. Then, of course, he would tease one for finding that particular section of coastline more interesting than any other.

As his films remain, so does the man who made them for us, but the Fritz Lang some will miss most is the truly great friend, who relaxed in the sunshine and talked of other things besides film while casting a fond and satisfied gaze on the dolphins and the penguins at play.

DAVID OVERBEY

Television and Movies

Question: What do the following films have in common: *Duel*, *The Salamander*, *Kaspar Hauser*, *Scenes from a Marriage*, *Spider's Strategy*, *Clowns*? Answer: They are all films made for television and distributed in the cinemas. Co-production with television is a feature of nearly every film-producing country, bar Britain. If industries can be resuscitated, even in some instances created from scratch (whoever heard of Swiss films?), why can't we manage to do it here?

The answer is that we can, but perhaps we should take a look first at Germany, if only because in the recent past the German film industry was in an even worse state than ours is today. Now it is one of the most vital in Europe, and at least part of the reason is that West German television recognises its responsibilities towards film-making as a part of cultural expression. The rebirth of German cinema began in the early 1960s with a massive reorganisation of film aid, but continued production today rests to a large extent on collaboration with television.

This happens in two ways: first, there is direct involvement by television companies in independent film production for their own initial consumption. In 1974 this was in the region of £40m (to cover all types of film production, not just feature films). This massive annual expenditure derives historically from the fact that German television invested much less in productive capacity (electronic studios and equipment) than British television in the same period, and consequently finds itself now in a much more flexible position to encourage collaboration. It means, however, that creative demands are exclusively television oriented—which is not always a good thing. So in 1974 a television film fund was created, a minimum of 34 million DM over a period of four years put into a special fund by the television companies for the financing of up to 75 per cent of the cost of feature films in return for one or two showings on TV. The films are distributed for up to eighteen months before they are shown on television. This is where *Kaspar Hauser* got its money, along with 23 other films in the first year of the operation of the fund.

Different systems operate in different countries. Is there any way it could be made to happen in Britain? Taking a lead from the recent White Paper on the future of the film industry (is it just a smokescreen?), and the recommendations made to the Annan Committee reviewing the future of Broadcasting by the Association of Independent Producers, I suggest that there are three ways.

1. *Through the existing television organisations.* In order to induce the ITV companies to invest in feature film production, the IBA

Act of 1974 should be amended to allow film production as 'relevant expenditure' against the levy on excess profits. The BBC Charter (drawn up long before anyone knew what co-production meant, and which effectively prevents collaboration) should be amended to allow the BBC to compete on an equal basis with the ITV companies. And, finally, films made for dual release should be eligible for Eady money.

2. *Through a proposed fourth television channel.* If there is to be a fourth channel, then it should act as a distribution channel, and invest in no productive capital equipment. Apart from reducing the cost of setting up the channel, the consequent commissioning of programmes would allow for a continual turnover of talent and ideas which are at present stifled by slavery to the capital costs of television production. Within this system, a programme of 25 films per year partly or wholly financed by the channel (Perhaps in conjunction with the new British Film Authority? If it ever comes into being?) would be an exciting and I think feasible proposition. After all, this is approximately what happened with RAI in Italy in the early 1970s, and the consequence was a series of high quality films.

3. *Through a television film fund,* to be set up along the lines of the West German model and financed out of the excess profits levy on TV advertising.

There are different styles and levels of co-production: 'seed money' for developing projects, pre-sales of rights, distribution guarantees and so on. The level of involvement and control by television would vary according to the level of investment that the companies were prepared to make. Experience has shown one thing, however, in all the countries where this now happens. If the film is shown first on television, then it's a dead duck, its potential cinema audience gone for ever. But given a continuous programme of production and a stockpile of films, there is no reason why this should be the case, and 18 months cinema distribution would allow the films time to recoup what monies they can from the British market.

Co-production keeps the price of movie-making down to a realistic level. One of the things that cripples film production in this country is that usually in order to raise the money for a film you need a guarantee from a distributor, and he will not very often give it unless he's sure the film is going to sell in the States. Which means having a 'bankable' star. Which means that the film becomes a massive financial operation. Which means that it usually does not get made. Television does not have these problems: it has its own audience, it is its own distributor. Films are costed on an entirely different basis, in other words a realistic one (£150,000 approximately at today's prices). Making

a film in these circumstances, people trust each other because everybody knows that nobody is going to walk away a rich man, nobody is going to make a killing. That is the way the system worked in Italy; and we could profit by their experience by putting a scheme like this within the context of proper negotiations with the Unions.

The film industry has always been deeply suspicious of television. After all, did it not steal the audience away from the cinemas and then exploit the film industry by showing cheap films on television, giving a native industry no chance against American films sold at a give-away price? Yet arguing for a limitation of films shown on television is a negative response. People will always watch television whatever is on, and stopping it showing films is not going to drive them back to the cinemas in appreciable enough numbers to make any difference in the long run. Cinema has become a minority entertainment.

Arguing that you might get a better price for films is more positive, but difficult in the face of the television monopoly in this country and the American film 'dumping' practices. But arguing for co-production, with television supplying a guaranteed showing in return for financial involvement, is the most positive approach you can take. And, curiously enough, television needs film just as much as film needs television, not only because film is an essential part of programming and you can't go on showing old movies for ever, but because television in this country is stagnating, it does not know where to go.

Ironically, until recently some of our best film-making talent has been nurtured in television (if one takes film-making in its broadest sense to include drama on film, documentaries, etc.). But because of the way television here has grown up, with its heavy investment in studio facilities, it has meant that in times of economic crisis there is a lack of flexibility and mobility, and film-making is the first to go down the drain. This year there are only a handful of drama films being made. Then, they will be seen once or twice and consigned to oblivion. With co-production, television gets an exciting new product and an extended life for that product—a look in at the cinemas. The film industry gets its distribution guarantee, its audience and a decent price on the box.

There are no panaceas as far as the British film industry is concerned. The concept of state involvement has to be rethought, the monopolies of distribution and exhibition broken; many things have to be changed. This is just one idea, but it has one great merit. It has been proved to have worked in other countries, stimulating film-makers, enlivening television and creating opportunities for employment. It can work here.

MICHAEL RADFORD

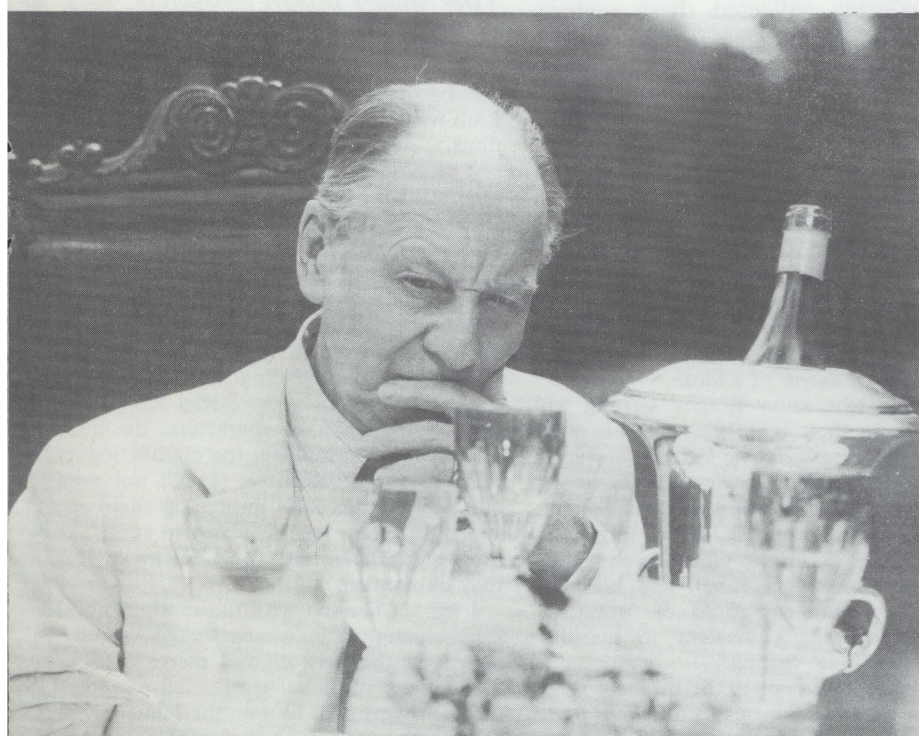
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ALAIN
RESNAIS'





Scripted by David Mercer, *Providence* is Alain Resnais' first film in English. As Richard Roud reported in our Summer issue, it's about an elderly novelist and his relationships—'real' or not so real—with the family who assemble for his birthday celebrations. John Gielgud (below, and left with Peter Arne) plays the novelist. Dirk Bogarde (below) is his barrister son; Elaine Stritch (above, with Resnais, and below) plays the barrister's mistress.





Translations
by
Gloria Waldman
and
Ronald Christ

BORGES as film critic

In the early 1930s, Victoria Ocampo, a passionate moviegoer, asked Jorge Luis Borges to write film reviews for *Sur*, the distinguished Argentine literary journal that she had founded and still directs. Borges agreed, and from 1931 to 1945 his comments on films appeared in *Sur* at fairly regular intervals. Recently, the Argentine director and critic, Edgardo Cozarinsky, collected these reviews and supplemented them with critical explanations and notes in the volume *Borges y el Cine* (*Sur*, Buenos Aires, 1974). The following translations are taken from that volume; an adaptation of Cozarinsky's introductory essay, 'Borges on and in Film', was published in the winter 1975/76 issue of *SIGHT AND SOUND*.

Borges began his reviewing with a piece on several films, including Chaplin's *City Lights*, which he modestly entitled 'Films'. Tentatively, almost as if he had to remind himself of what he was doing, Borges opened the review by saying: 'I am writing my opinion about some recent films.' But in the next breath he was deep into the business of declaring which of them was the best and why. From that moment on, he never wavered in segregating what he took to be the good from the bad, often with sharp irony: 'This film—*Los muchachos de antes no usaban gomina* (*The Boys of Yesteryear did not use Hair Tonic*)—is unquestionably one of the best Argentine films that I have seen, which is to say, one of the worst films in the world.'

As a matter of fact, Borges mainly devoted himself to foreign films and, among those, mostly to North American films. His passion for the early work of von Sternberg is well known, and his review of *Citizen*

Kane has been published in an English translation; but his admiration for such films as *The Informer*, *The Petrified Forest* and *Green Pastures* has been less widely recognised. As has been the way in which he uniformly attributes the success or failure of the film to its director, seeing a direct equivalence between the author of a book and the *auteur* of a film.

Readers who know Borges' writing will recognise in these pieces traits of his other works: his characteristic disdain for local colour, his tendency to view any particular as one unit in a universal series (the practice of dubbing, for example, is put into a set that includes a Greek monster, the Holy Ghost and the hypercube), and his contempt for films comprised of 'beautiful' photography—the equivalent to his disapproval of 'fine' writing.

Ultimately, of course, the merit of these reviews rests on the quality of their prose as much as it does on their critical values.

Just as Borges was to upset the world of Spanish fiction in the mid 1930s by writing a *Universal History of Infamy*, which he declared to be made up only of a surface of words with no reality behind them, so in these reviews he is often playing an amusing game of weaving his prose with images and phrases that are of a purely 'literary' value. Most evident, perhaps, is the persistent theological imagery that crops up in repeated references to original sin, the *felix culpa*, perdition and salvation. These images on the surface of his writing surely owe a good deal to his interest in the literally superficial images of what he likes to call 'the silver screen'.

A few months ago, when I asked Borges about these early reviews, he said: 'Look, they're mere scribbling. No, not even. *Scratching* on the page. I was asked to do them and I did them.' But with our growing awareness of his work, we can see in these brief essays not only a remarkable foundation for much that he was to write later—proving the power of film in the work of this acknowledged master—but also a valuable series of experiments in the art of prose. All this as a bonus to the witty, quirky insights into the films themselves.

RONALD CHRIST



'Der Mörder Dimitri Karamasoff': Fritz Kortner, Anna Sten

FILMS

(*Der Mörder Dimitri Karamasoff*, Ozep, 1931; *City Lights*, Chaplin, 1931; *Morocco*, von Sternberg, 1930)

I am writing my opinion about some recent films.

The best, considerably outdistancing the others: *Der Mörder Dimitri Karamasoff* (Filmreich). Without visible discomfort, its director, Ozep, has avoided the proclaimed and established errors of German films—lugubrious symbolism; tautology or meaningless repetition of equivalent images; obscenity; a propensity for teratology; and satanism—without falling into the still less resplendent errors of the Soviet school: the absolute omission of characters, the mere photographic anthology, the clumsy seductions of the Committee. (I will not even mention the French: until now their one and only desire has been not to seem like the Americans—a risk, I assure them, that they do not run.)

I am not familiar with the spacious novel from which this film was excavated—a fortunate fault that has allowed me to enjoy it without the continual temptation to superimpose the present film on the remembered reading in order to see if they coincide. So,

with immaculate disregard for its irreverent desecrations and its spotless fidelities—both unimportant—the present film is extremely powerful. Its reality, although purely hallucinatory, without either subordination or cohesion, is no less overpowering than the reality of Josef von Sternberg's *The Docks of New York*. Its presentation of a frank, genuine joy after a murder is one of its high points. The photography—one shot of the approaching dawn, one of monumental billiard balls waiting for the collision, another of Smerdiakov's clerical hand withdrawing the money—is excellent in both conception and execution.

I pass on to another film. Charlie Chaplin's film, mysteriously entitled *City Lights*, has received the unconditional applause of all our critics. The truth is that its published acclaim is more a proof of our telegraphic and postal service than a personal, presumptuous act. Who would dare to overlook the fact that Charlie Chaplin is one of the stable gods in the mythology of our time, colleague of the still nightmares of Chirico, of the ardent machine-guns of Scarface Al, of the finite, although unlimited universe of the summital shoulders of Greta Garbo, of the glassed-in eyes of Gandhi? Who did not know beforehand that Chaplin's most recent *comédie larmoyante* was astonishing? In reality—in what I believe is reality—this much-seen film from the splendid creator and hero of *The Gold Rush* is no more than a weak anthology of small mishaps imposed on a sentimental story. One of these episodes is new; another, like that of the professional joy of the dustman confronting the providential (and subsequently fake) elephant that provides him with a dose of *raison d'être*, is a facsimile of the incident with the Trojan garbage man and the false Greek horse in the neglected film *The Private Life of Helen of Troy*.

More general objections can also be alleged against *City Lights*. Its lack of reality is only comparable to its lack—just as exasperating—of unreality. There are true to life pictures—*For the Defence* [John Cromwell, 1930], *Street of Chance* [John Cromwell, 1929], *The Crowd* [King Vidor, 1928], even *Broadway Melody* [Harry Beaumont, 1929]—and there are wilfully unrealistic pictures: the very individualistic ones of Borzage, those of Harry Langdon, Buster Keaton and Eisenstein. Chaplin's early escapades correspond to the second variety, undoubtedly supported by superficial photography, by the ghostly speed of the action; by the actors' false moustaches, foolish artificial beards, mussed wigs and ominous great-coats. *City Lights* does not achieve that unreality and it remains unconvincing. Except for the luminous blind woman, who has the extraordinary characteristic of being beautiful, and with the exception of Charlie himself, always so disguised and slight, all his characters are recklessly normal. His ramshackle argument belongs to the diffuse connecting technique of twenty years ago. Archaism and anachronism are also literary modes, I know; but their deliberate handling is different from their unfortunate perpetration. I relinquish my hope—too often fulfilled—of not being right.

Weariness is also noticeable in Sternberg's *Morocco*, if only to a degree less powerful and suicidal. The tense photography, the exquisite organisation, the oblique and yet

sufficient method of *Underworld*, have been replaced here by the mere accumulation of extras, by the broad brush-strokes of local colour. In his desire to express Morocco, Sternberg did not conceive of a less brutal medium than the overworked counterfeiting of a Moorish city in the Hollywood suburbs, with the extravagance of burnouses and fountains and tall guttural muezzins who precede the dawn and the camels with sun. On the other hand, its general argument is good and its clear resolution in the desert, back at the starting point once again, is that of our first *Martin Fierro*, or of the novel *Sanin* by the Russian Arzibashev. *Morocco* can be viewed sympathetically, but not with the intellectual pleasure that one gets from the first viewing (and even the second viewing) of earlier works by Sternberg. Not with the valid intellectual pleasure produced by that heroic film *The Drag Net*.

Sur, No. 3. Winter 1931

STREET SCENE (King Vidor, 1931)

The Russians discovered that the oblique shot (and, consequently, the deformed shot) of a bottle, a bull's neck or a column was of greater plastic value than Hollywood's thousand and one extras, quickly got up as Assyrians and then shuffled into total confusion by Cecil B. DeMille. They also discovered that the conventions of the Mid-west—the merits of accusation and spying, the lasting happiness of marriage, the untouchable purity of prostitutes, the conclusive upper-cut dealt by a sober young man—could be exchanged for others no less admirable. (Thus, in one of the loftiest Soviet films, a battleship bombards the overstocked port of Odessa at close range, with no casualty other than some marble lions. This harmless marksmanship is occasioned by a virtuous, extremist battleship.)

Such discoveries were proposed to a world saturated to the point of disgust with the emanations of Hollywood. The world respected these discoveries and stretched its gratitude to the point of pretending that Soviet cinema had wiped out American cinema forever. (Those were the years when Alexander Block announced, in the characteristic tone of Walt Whitman, that the Russians were Scythians.) The world forgot or tried to forget that the greatest virtue of Russian film was its interruption of a continuous, Californian regimen. It was forgotten that one could contrast some good or excellent passions (*Ivan the Terrible*, *Battleship Potemkin*, maybe *October*) to a vast and complex literature, practised with happy fulfilment in all the genres from the incomparable comic (Chaplin, Buster Keaton and Langdon) to the pure inventions of fantasy: the mythology of Krazy Kat and of Bimbo... Alarm at the Russians grew; Hollywood reformed or enriched some of its photographic habits, and did not bother itself greatly.

King Vidor did. I am speaking of the uneven director of works as memorable as *Hallelujah* and of such unnecessary and trivial ones as *Billy the Kid*, that shameful chronicling of the twenty murders (not counting Mexicans) committed by the famous fighter of Arizona, a film made with



'Morocco': Marlene Dietrich, Adolphe Menjou

no other merit than the accumulation of panoramic takes and the methodical elimination of close-ups in order to suggest the desert. His most recent work, *Street Scene*, adapted from the comedy of the same name by the ex-expressionist Elmer Rice, is inspired by the simple, negative desire not to look 'standard'. It has an unsatisfactory minimum of argument. It has a hero who is virtuous but under the influence of a thug. It has a romantic couple, but any civil or religious union is forbidden to them. It has a glorious, excessive Italian—larger than life—who is evidently responsible for all the comedy in the piece, a man whose limitless unreality also rubs off on his normal colleagues. It has characters who seem true to life; it has others who are in masquerade. Basically, it is not a realistic work; it is the repression or frustration of a romantic work.

Two great scenes elevate the film: the one of a dawn where the splendid course of the night is epitomised in music; that of the murder, which is indirectly presented to us in the tumult and tempest of the faces.

Excellent actors and photography.

Sur, No. 5. Summer 1932

THE INFORMER (John Ford, 1935)

I do not know the popular novel from which this film was taken: a fortunate fault that has allowed me to follow it without the continual temptation to superimpose the present showing on the recalled reading in order to test for coincidences. I have followed it. I judge it one of the best films that this past year has offered us. I judge it too memorable not to provoke a discussion and not to merit a reproach. Various reproaches, really, since it has run the beautiful risk of being entirely satisfactory, and for two or three reasons, has not been.

The first is the excessive motivation for the hero's actions. I understand that what they are after is verisimilitude, but film directors—and novelists—are in the habit of forgetting that many justifications (and many circumstantial details) are counter-productive. Reality is not vague, but our general perception of reality is; and here lies the danger in over-justifying actions or in inventing numerous details. In the particular case that I am considering—the man who suddenly becomes Judas, the man who denounces his friend to the machine-guns of the police as well as to the scourge of death—the erotic motive that is evoked seems, in some ways, to diminish the felony and its heinous miracle. Infamy committed



Bette Davis in 'The Petrified Forest'

for amusement, for the mere brutality of infamy, would have been more artistically impressive. I also think that it would have been more accurate. (An excellent film, which is undone by the excessive psychologising of the motives, is Marcel L'Herbier's *Le Bonheur*.)

Clearly, the plurality of motives in itself does not seem bad to me. I admire the scene where the informer squanders his Judas money because of his triple need to confuse; to bribe the dreadful friends, who are perhaps his judges and will finally be his executioners; and to see himself free of those bank notes that dishonour him.

Another weakness of *The Informer* is that of its beginning and its end. The opening episode seems false. In part, that is due to the too typical, too *European* (in the Californian sense of that word) street that they present to us. It is undeniable that a street in Dublin is not absolutely equivalent to a street in San Francisco, but it looks more like such a street—in order for both to be authentic—than like an obvious sham, overstocked and weighed down with local colour. More than universal similarities, local differences seem to have made a greater impression on Hollywood: there is no American director, confronted with the imaginary problem of showing a railroad crossing in Spain or an uncultivated field in Austro-Hungary, who does not solve it by means of a special reconstruction, whose only merit has to be the ostentation of its expense. As for the ending, I find fault with it for another reason. That the audience is moved by the horrifying fate of the informer seems good to me; that the director of the film is moved and gives him over to a sentimental death with Catholic church windows and organ music seems to me less admirable.

In this film, the merits are less subtle than the faults and do not require emphasising. Nevertheless, I want one very powerful touch to stand out: the last grating of his nails on the cornice and the disappearance of his hand when the dangling man is machine-gunned and falls to the ground. Of the three tragic unities, two have been observed: the unities of action and time; the neglect of the third, that of place, cannot be a cause for complaint. By its very nature, cinematography seems to reject that third norm and requires continuous displacements. (The dangers of dogmatism: the admirable memory of *Payment Deferred* [Lothar Mendes, 1932]—divine justice—alerts me to the mistake of generalising. In that film, the fact that everything takes place in one house, almost in one single room, is a fundamental virtue of the tragedy.)

Sur, No 11. August 1935

THE PETRIFIED FOREST

(Archie L. Mayo, 1936)

It is a common observation that allegories are tolerable in direct proportion to their inconsistency and vagueness, which does not signify an apology for inconsistency and vagueness; but, rather, a proof—a sign, at least—that the genre of allegory is a mistake. The genre of allegory, I said, is not the allegorical components or suggestions. (The best and most famous allegory, *The Pilgrim's Progress from this World to That which is to Come*, by the Puritan visionary John Bunyan, has to be read as a novel, not as a prophecy, but if we cut out all the symbolic justifications the work would be absurd.) The dose of allegory in the film *The Petrified Forest* is perhaps irreproachable: light enough so as not to invalidate the drama's reality, substantial enough to legitimatise the drama's improbabilities. On the other hand, two or three weaknesses or pedantries in the dialogue continue to annoy me: a confused theological theory of neuroses, the summary (totally and minutely inaccurate) of a poem by Eliot, the contrived allusions to Villon, Mark Twain and Billy the Kid so that the audience will feel erudite in recognising those names.

Once the allegorical intention is dismissed or relegated to a secondary position, the argument of *The Petrified Forest*—the magical influence of approaching death on a haphazard group of men and women—seems admirable to me. In this film, death works like a hypnotist or like alcohol: it brings out into the light of day what the characters have within their souls. These characters are extraordinarily distinct: the smiling, anecdotal grandfather who sees everything as a performance and greets the desolation and the bullets as a happy return to the turbulent normalcy of his youth; the exhausted gunman, Mantee, resigned to killing (and to making others kill) as the others are to dying; the imposing and completely vain banker with his diplomat's air of a great man of our conservative party; the girl Gabrielle who is given to attributing the romantic turn of her mind to her French blood and her qualities of good *ménagère* to her Yankee origins; the poet who advises her to reverse the terms of that attribution which is so American—and so mythical.

I do not recall any other movies by Archie Mayo. This film (along with *The Passing of the Third Floor Back*) is one of the most intense that I have seen.

Sur, No. 24. September 1936

WELLS THE VISIONARY

(*Things to Come*, William Cameron Menzies, 1936)

The author of *The Invisible Man*, *The First Men in the Moon*, *The Time Machine* and *The Island of Dr. Moreau*—I have cited his best novels, which are certainly not his most recent—has published the detailed text of his recent film, *Things to Come*, in a book of 140 pages. Did he do this, perhaps, in order to dissociate himself a little from that film? In order not to be held responsible for the whole of it? The suspicion is not illegiti-

mate. For the time being, there is an initial chapter of instructions which justifies or tolerates that suspicion. It is written there that the men of the future will not be rigged up as telephone poles nor will they appear to be escapees from an electrical operating room nor will they run from one place to another encased in luminous suits made of cellophane, in glass jars or in aluminium boilers: 'I want Oswald Cabal,' Wells writes, 'to look like a fine gentleman, not a padded lunatic or an armoured gladiator... no nightmare stuff, no jazz. Human affairs in that more organised world will not be hurried, they will not be crowded, there will be more leisure, more dignity. Things, structures in general, will be greater, yes, but they will not be monstrous.*' Unfortunately, the grandiose film that we have seen—'grandiose' in the worst sense of that bad word—has very little to do with these intentions. True, there are not a lot of cellophane boilers, aluminium neckties, padded gladiators or mad men shining in their panoply; but the overall effect (much more important than the details) is 'of nightmare stuff'. I am not referring to the first part, where the monstrosity is deliberate; I am referring to the last, where order ought to contrast with the bloody jumble of the first, but which not only does not contrast but, rather, exceeds the first in hideousness. Wells starts out by showing us the terrors of the immediate future, visited with plagues and bombardments; this exposition is very effective. (I recall a clear sky darkened and stained by airplanes as obscene and pestilential as locusts.) Then—I will tell it in the author's words—'the film broadens out to display the grandiose spectacle of a reconstructed world.' That 'broadening out' is rather unfortunate; the heaven of Alexander Korda and Wells, like that of so many other eschatologists and scenographers, is not very different from their hell, and it is even less charming.

Another comparison: the book's memorable lines do not correspond—cannot correspond—to the film's memorable moments. On page 19, Wells writes that 'A rapid succession of flashes evoke the confused inadequate efficiency of our world.† As could be foreseen, the contrast of the words 'confusion' and 'efficiency' (not to mention the judgment in the epithet 'inadequate') has not been translated into images. On page 56, Wells says of the masked aviator, Cabal: 'He stands out against the sky, a tall portent‡'.

*Borges translates from *Things to Come*, *A Film by H. G. Wells* (New York, 1935). Typically—as his next sentence playfully emphasises—he is quite free with his source. For example, the book is 155 pages long, not 140; the name Oswald Cabal does not appear in the first clause that Borges quotes; the phrase he renders with an initial capital letter as 'Nada de jazz ni de artificios pesadilla' derives from a sentence in Wells that reads: 'But, remember, fine clothes, please; not nightmare stuff, not jazz'; the second and third sentences are not contiguous on page xii. (Trans.)

†Borges distorts the English text in order to make its opening mesh with his own syntax; his translation omits the phrase 'multitudinousness, the hurry and' which follows the word 'evoke' in Wells' text. (Characteristically, Borges' suppression gives greater force to the subsequent oxymoron.) (Trans.)

‡The sentence that Borges translates is on page 51, not 50, and while his translation is quite faithful, he refers to Cabal as 'enmascarado' without explaining that the mask in question is a futuristic gas mask. (Trans.)

The sentence is beautiful; its photographic version is not. (Even if it had been, it could never have corresponded to the sentence since the arts of rhetoric and cinema—oh, classic ghost of Efraim Lessing!—are absolutely incomparable.) On the other hand, there are successful sequences which owe nothing at all to the indications of the text.

Tyrants offend Wells but laboratories please him, hence his forecasts that scientists will join together in order to unite a world wrecked by tyrants. Thus far, reality does not resemble his prophecy: in 1936, almost all the tyrants' power derives from their control of technology. Wells reveres chauffeurs and aviators; the tyrannical occupation of Abyssinia was the work of aviators and chauffeurs—and the fear, perhaps a bit mythological, of Hitler's depraved laboratories.

I have found fault with the film's second half; I insist on praising the first, with its wholesome effect for those people who still imagine war as a romantic cavalcade or a chance for wonderful picnics and free tourism.

Sur, No. 26. November 1936

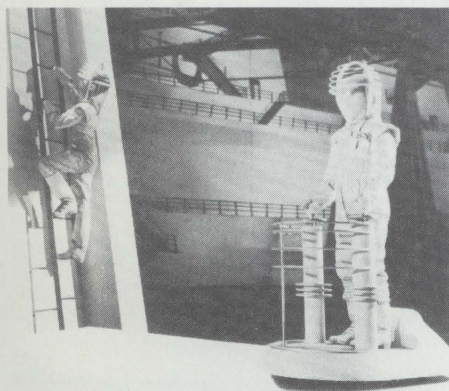
THE ROAD BACK

(James Whale, 1937)

In the winter of 1872, among the jacaranda furniture of a hotel whose balconies faced the treeless Victoria Plaza, don José Hernández—enemy of Sarmiento and of Mitre—wanted to expose the degradation that the disastrous military regime had produced in the natives of Buenos Aires and wrote the anti-war poem *The Gaucho Martín Fierro*. The hero—who is not aware of it?—was a deserter from the army; his companion a deserter from the police. We are familiar with the consequences. Around 1894, Unamuno discovered that Hernández' book 'was the song of the Spanish fighter who, after having planted the cross in Granada, went to America to serve the progress of civilisation and to open the road into the desert.' In 1916, Lugones stated, 'And for that reason—because it personifies the heroic life of the people with their language and their most genuine feelings, embodying it in a champion or, rather, in the most perfect symbol of justice and liberation—*Martín Fierro* is an epic poem.'

I have recalled the case of *Martín Fierro* because it is not unusual. Works denouncing the indignities or the horrors of war always

'Things to Come': '...encased in luminous suits made of cellophane'



run the risk of seeming to be a vindication of war. In effect, the more horrible the war, the greater its satanic prestige, the greater the virtue of those men who look it in the face. That stubborn Dr. Johnson once declared that patriotism is the last refuge of a scoundrel. Around 1778 he also said that the profession of sailors and soldiers has the dignity of danger. Of the acclaimed pacifist film, *All Quiet on the Western Front*, what remains now in our memory? A fierce and enviable bayonet charge, exactly like the ones shown in any war movie.

The Road Back is undeniably inferior to *All Quiet on the Western Front*. Its climactic moment is also one of battle. The peculiar pathos of the scene comes from its being absolutely clear to us that the soldiers' fears and agonies are useless: Germany had already surrendered. The other scenes seem to me very forgettable. The thesis (I think) is the unadaptability of the military to civilian life, the conflicts of city ethics with trench ethics. Fear of rendering the protagonists disagreeable has dulled or cancelled out the demonstration of the thesis. It is true that one of the veterans winds up a murderer, but his victim is such an execrable, such an oily, such a minutely Jewish *Schieber* that his destruction is in every light a meritorious act. Another of the veteran fighters ends up in a marriage of convenience; another improvising speeches; another coveting (and stealing) other people's chickens.

On seeing *The Road Back*, I felt that mere pacifism is not enough. War is an ancient passion that tempts men with ascetic and mortal charms. In order to abolish it, you have to confront it with another passion. Maybe that of the good European—Leibnitz, Voltaire, Goethe, Arnold, Renan, Shaw, Russell, Unamuno, T. S. Eliot—who recognises himself as the heir and the perpetuator of all the countries. Unfortunately, Europe is teeming with mere Germans and mere Irishmen. Europeans are scarce.

Sur, No. 38. November 1937

ON DUBBING

The possibilities of the art of combining are not infinite but they are apt to be frightening. The Greeks engendered the chimera, a monster with the head of a lion, the head of a dragon and the head of a goat; the theologians of the second century, the Trinity, in which the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost are inextricably linked; the Chinese zoologists, the *ti-yang*, a bright red, supernatural bird provided with six feet and six wings but with neither a face nor eyes; the geometrists of the nineteenth century, the hypercube, a four-dimensional figure which encloses an infinite number of cubes and is bounded by eight cubes and twenty-four squares. Hollywood has just enriched this frivolous, teratological museum: by means of a perverse artifice they call *dubbing*, they offer monsters which combine the well-known features of Greta Garbo with the voice of Aldonza Lorenzo. How can we fail to proclaim our admiration for this distressing prodigy, for these ingenious audio-visual anomalies?

Those who defend dubbing reason (perhaps) that the objections which can be

brought against it can, similarly, be brought against any other example of translation. This argument ignores, or avoids, the central fault; the arbitrary grafting on of another voice and of another language. The voice of Hepburn or Garbo is not accidental; it is, for the world, one of the attributes which defines them. Similarly, it is worth remembering that the sign language of English is different from that of Spanish.*

I have heard that dubbing is enjoyed in the provinces. That is a question of a simple argument from authority, and as long as they do not publish the syllogisms of the *connaisseurs* from Chilecito and Chivilcoy,† I, at least, shall not let myself be intimidated. I also hear that dubbing is delightful, or tolerable, for those who do not know English. My comprehension of English is less perfect than my incomprehension of Russian; nevertheless, I would never resign myself to seeing *Alexander Nevsky* again in a language other than the original, and I would see it eagerly, for the ninth or tenth time, if they showed it in the original version or one that I believed to be the original. This last point is important: worse than dubbing, worse than the substitution that dubbing implies, is the wide-spread recognition of a substitution, of a deception.

There is no advocate of dubbing who does not end up by invoking predestination and determinism. They swear that this expedient is the result of an inexorable evolution and that soon we will choose to see dubbed films or not see films at all. Given the world-wide



Peter Lorre and Sidney Greenstreet in 'The Mask of Dimitrios'

decadence of motion pictures—hardly reformed by any single exception like *The Mask of Dimitrios* [Jean Negulesco, 1944]—the second of these alternatives is not painful. Recent bad pictures—I am thinking of Moscow's *The Diary of a Nazi* [producer, Mikhail Romm, 1943] and Hollywood's *The Story of Dr. Wassell* [Cecil B. DeMille, 1944]—prompt us to judge movies as a kind of negative paradise. 'Sightseeing is the art of disappointment,' Stevenson noted. The definition applies to films and, with sad frequency, to that continuous, unavoidable exercise called life.

Sur, No. 128. June 1945

*More than one spectator asks himself: since there is usurpation of voices why not of faces as well? When will the system be perfect? When will we see Juana González directly in the role of Greta Garbo, to that role of Queen Christina of Sweden?

†Two provincial towns, the former in central Rioja province and the latter in northern Buenos Aires province. (Trans.)

'BEYOND FREEDOM AND DIGNITY':

An analysis of
Jacques Tati's **PLAYTIME**

Lucy Fischer

'We attempt to gain credit for ourselves by disguising or concealing control.'

—B. F. Skinner, 'Beyond Freedom and Dignity'

In his influential essay 'The Evolution of the Language of Cinema', André Bazin applauds the emergence of a new stage in the development of cinematic language—one characterised by the stylistic triad of the long-shot, the long-take and deep-focus photography. For Bazin this style represents not only a progression on the formal level beyond the aesthetics of montage, but an advance in terms of the dynamics of spectator consciousness. Bazin makes several claims concerning the implications of the long-take style.* He asserts that it elicits a more active mental response from the spectator and encourages in him a more dynamic contribution to the viewing process. He claims as well that unlike montage (which guides the spectator's attention) the long-take style allows him 'to exercise at least a minimum of personal choice.'

When one confronts the films and public statements of Jacques Tati, one senses the existence of a film-maker who has thoroughly embraced Bazin's theories. With a phrasing reminiscent of Bazin, Tati has said that his goal in creating comic films is to 'make people smile and . . . give them a choice.' Like a true Bazinian, he has also emphasised the manner in which his films require a particularly active mental attitude on the part of the viewer. He has spoken despondently of how modern audiences are passive and not used to participation, and has referred to his own films in a *Cahiers du Cinéma* interview (1968) as presupposing 'a little more attention and a little more imagination on the part of the spectator.'

Tati's emphasis on spectator consciousness is also fundamentally related to the content of his films. From *Les Vacances de M. Hulot* through *Trafic* they have constituted an attack on the mechanised aspects of contemporary western life and the manner in which these qualities deprive people of their autonomy. In the interview in *Cahiers du*

Cinéma, for example, he speaks of how automobile technology has progressively robbed people of a sense of involvement in the experience of driving. He goes on to

* For the sake of brevity, the term 'long-take style' will be used at points to signify the conjunction of long-take, long-shot and deep-focus.

'Multiple areas of interest . . .': the entrance to the Royal Garden restaurant





'It is up to the spectator to discover what he wants to see'

apply this automotive imagery to a discussion of his films, noting that his style allows people to 'participate a little more, to let them "change speeds" themselves, not to do their work for them.' The Bazinian parallel is neatly completed by the fact that Tati consistently shoots in long-shot/long-take/deep-focus and attributes the effect of his films to precisely this series of stylistic devices: 'I believe to shoot (*sic*) an image where people can find what they like to find. That way it is partly the picture you make it, what you see, what you choose.'

Because of this convergence of a radicalised long-take style of film-making with a neo-Bazinian theoretical base, Tati's films can serve as particularly fruitful occasions for testing the validity of Bazin's ideas. It is, therefore, not surprising to find that the critical response to *Playtime*—Tati's most exemplary work—has often been posed within a Bazinian framework. Jonathan Rosenbaum, for example, situates his discussion of the film (in *Film Comment*) precisely within that theoretical context: 'To some degree *Playtime* can be regarded as an embodiment and extension of Bazin's most cherished ideas about deep focus, long takes and the "democratic" freedoms that these techniques offer to the spectator.'

From this vantage point, *Playtime* is seen as offering a retrospective vindication of Bazin's controversial position. Thus, in the figurative trial of Bazin's ideas that has ensued in the twenty-odd years since the publication of his essay, a film like *Playtime* comes to constitute a long-awaited piece of exonerating evidence. It will be the object of this analysis to show that as evidence it is largely 'circumstantial'.

In his theoretical discussions, Tati (like Bazin) seems consistently to assume an *intrinsic* relationship between the long-shot format and spectator freedom. He says, for example: 'I love the long-shot. It is up to the spectator to discover what he wants to

see.' By contrasting it with the close-up (which 'emphasises' and 'insists'), Tati is clearly attributing the element of choice in the viewing of his films to his use of a particular camera distance.

What Tati obscures is the fact that his long-shots are executed in a specific, highly idiosyncratic manner. The use of a long-shot format does not imply a uniform, monolithic style; it is the manner in which a long-shot is articulated, rather than the long-shot itself, which would seem to be the determining factor in viewer perception. The long-shot is neutral: it can lead either to spectator freedom or spectator control. Obviously a long-shot containing a leading man standing against a blank wall does not produce the same effect as a long-shot taken out of *Playtime*'s Royal Garden 'sequence'. Thus it is not the long-shot *per se* but rather the intricate way of structuring it that is truly significant. To the extent that spectator freedom undeniably exists within a film like *Playtime*, it does so not simply because of the film's employment of the long-shot camera distance, but rather because of its unique and complex mode of long-shot composition. That mode involves a conjunction of the following features:

(1) Tati often maps out simultaneous fields of action, all of equal weight. Thus while most directors arrange the frame so that important events take place in a particular zone, Tati's shots are blocked in terms of multiple areas of interest. One shot in the Royal Garden sequence can be divided into the following three planes: in the foreground a humorous pantomime evolves in which a waiter refuses to wait on tables which are not in his territory, even though all his tables are empty. In the mid-ground a subtle joke is rendered by having waiters serving behind a partition appear as though they were playing the vibes. In the background, through the louvred kitchen doors, we see the silhouette of a ladder and realise that the restaurant is in the process of disintegration.

(2) Tati frequently delineates several narrative threads in a synchronous fashion. Thus within one shot we may follow various subplots (for instance, that of Hulot and the businessman M. Giffard, as well as that of the American tourist ladies). This technique is further complicated by the overall narrative discontinuity of the film, which leaves the spectator in a continual state of disorientation.

(3) Tati generalises the possibility of action to a plethora of characters and objects. We have no real 'lead' characters in *Playtime*; rather, a variety of minor characters are responsible for major activities. Further, objects continually take on the anthropomorphic status of characters.

All these techniques contribute to the elaboration of sensory/intellectual overload within the frame, so that it is difficult for the spectator at any one moment to comprehend the totality of the action depicted. This, in some sense, invites him to 'search' and 'choose'; hence the metaphorical notion of freedom. But it is not my purpose here to clarify the manner in which spectator freedom is encouraged in Tati's films; that subject has received ample critical attention. Rather, my purpose will be to examine the other side of the coin and establish the more subtle and elusive ways in which that freedom is qualified or denied.

Both Bazin and Tati seem to make the mistake of associating directorial control almost exclusively with the power of analytical editing. Bazin says that montage forces the spectator 'to let his attention follow along smoothly with that of the director, who will choose what he should see.' And Tati states that he eschews close-ups so that the audience will be forced to 'see what they see with their own eyes, not what the camera tells them.' But there are other means by which the camera can 'tell' the spectator what to see apart from the technique of analytical cutting; and various sequences from *Playtime* disclose what they are.

Although on first viewing *Playtime* may seem chaotic (even random) in its organisation, multiple screenings reveal it to be one of the most meticulously structured films in the history of the medium. And as one begins to examine the specific formal elements that comprise its intricate design, one becomes increasingly aware of the extent to which they function systematically to direct the attention of the spectator.

One of the organic features in the scheme of the film is colour. Whenever Tati speaks of colour he always emphasises its use as a matter of conscious choice rather than passive recording. ('Colour photography, what is it for the cameraman? It is to film the colours that you have chosen.') Since in *Playtime* all the sets and props were specifically built for the film, each colour could be methodically worked into the overall design. Tati, in fact, conducted certain rather eccentric experiments for the film's colour scheme. For the opening sequence (which ostensibly takes place at Orly) he took black and white still photographs of the airport and asked Parisians familiar with the terminal to colour it in from memory. According to Tati no one could do it properly because no one had noticed. From this he concluded his total freedom to manipulate the colour of the décor in the manner he desired; and that involved the neutralisation of certain aspects of the *mise en scène* in order to direct attention to others.

Tati has explained this strategy with great precision: 'If you want to be able to see a character in an office it is necessary that he be the highly coloured element and not the décor. If there are several characters and all wear ties, it is important to place the red tie on the one among them that you want noticed. If your main character wears a black tie and a walk-on passes by him with a red tie, it is the latter that one will notice and your effect will be lost.' Tati further elucidates the relation of colour to narrative comprehensibility in the *Cahiers du Cinéma* interview, where he speaks of it in regard to the re-editing of *Playtime* for distribution. He talks of working with a black and white print and how the loss of colour severely limits the legibility of the film: '... there is no longer any film at all, it no longer means anything ... *Playtime* in black and white is unthinkable! One asks oneself all the time what is happening, one does not see the buttons light up, one does not see the rosettes of the Legion of Honour, one no longer recognises [M. Giffard] because he is lost in the crowd.'

The first thing one is struck by in re-examining *Playtime* with an eye towards this use of colour is the sparsity of tone that it employs. One can hardly believe that one has failed to notice that the film evolves against a background of abstract, blanched, monochromatic uniformity. In general only one or two items within the frame are strongly coloured, and invariably they are the items which we must attend to in order to comprehend or 'read' the action and the humour.

Tati himself mentions the case of M. Giffard, the businessman Hulot pursues throughout the film. One reason why we find ourselves 'discovering' him in chaotic long-shots is that he always carries a bright blue folder and wears a more muted blue jacket. The same strategy is utilised for one

of the Hulot 'doubles', whom we pick out throughout the trade exposition sequence by his red-checked scarf. Similarly, in the Royal Garden sequence, Barbara (Hulot's tourist friend) wears a bright green dress in a sea of black and white.

But it is useful to analyse one or two shots in depth to see how colour functions within the complex dynamics of the frame. Immediately before the American women tourists arrive at the trade exposition, Tati gives us a perverse 'establishing shot'. In the reflection on the glass of the exposition building we see the tourist bus arrive, while simultaneously we see on the wall's surface two travel posters: one for London, and one for another city. If we look very carefully we realise that the buildings depicted on the posters are almost exactly the same. (The next shot advances the joke by showing us the tourist ladies photographing a Paris edifice which is a virtual duplication of the

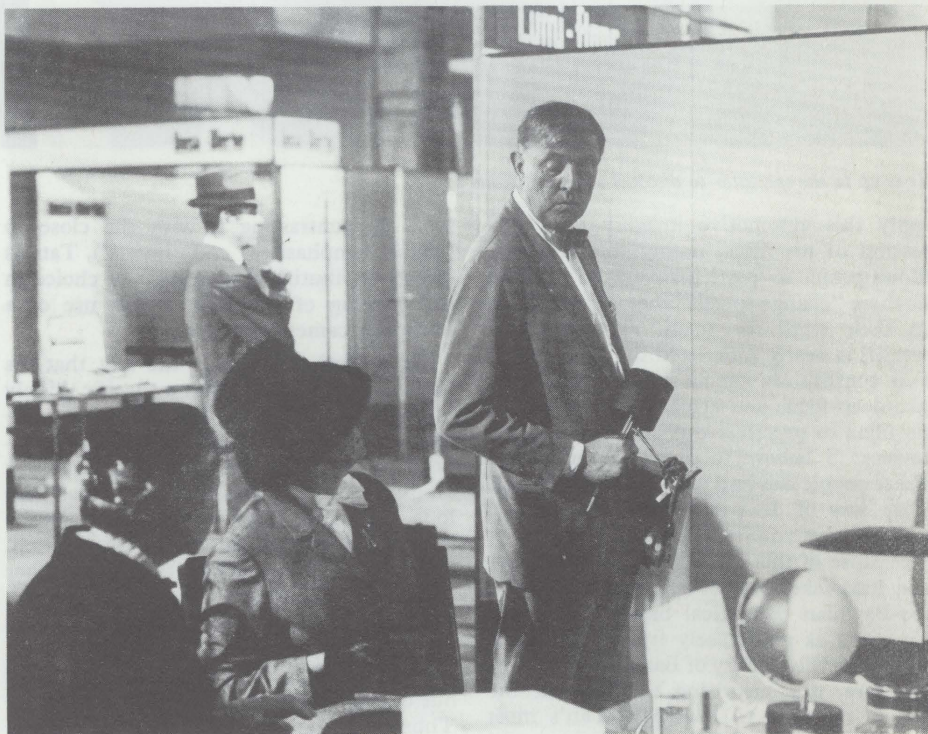
been urged to notice him because of the fact that in a colourless frame he is carrying an orange lampshade.

As Tati himself has stated: 'Colour is not decorative, for me, it is the primordial element of the narrative.' A few more examples will make this function clear:

(1) In the chaos of the kitchen of the disintegrating Royal Garden restaurant, a waiter walks in and puts a screwdriver on the table. We notice it because its handle is bright red.

(2) In the scene in which Hulot gets separated from Barbara in the department store, one of his problems is that he mistakenly tries to go through a 'turnstile' of paint brushes instead of the more conventional variety. We notice this because the paint brush handles are bright red.

Tati said in 1958 that in future it would be 'through colour that the style of a director will be revealed.' If we apply this to *Playtime*, we find his own use of colour revelatory



Tati is asked for assistance at the trade exposition

other two.) The clue to 'getting' the gag, however, lies in the fact that in the monochromatic frame both posters contain areas of bright red; the London poster, for example, poses a red bus before the model building. Each time that this bit is extended in the film (by situating another poster within the décor), it too will catch our attention by its use of an insistent red.

Another sequence in the trade exposition section is indicative of this technique. A gag unfolds which is based on three consecutive actions: (a) a man leaves the exposition hall carrying a floor lamp base; (b) he boards a bus; (c) the other passengers on the bus (including M. Hulot) hold on to his lamp as though it were a fixture of the vehicle. We wonder how this business can work since the man leaves the exposition hall in the midst of a visual chaos involving characters, objects and actions and enters the bus under much the same conditions. If we examine the shots that comprise this sequence, however, we realise that we have

of a highly conscious attempt to use the formal elements of a film to direct its 'reading'.

Perhaps part of the difficulty in exposing the strategies by which Tati manipulates audience attention revolves round the assumption by most critics that attention can only be directed *visually*. One of the major functions of Tati's remarkable soundtracks, however, is to provide aural cues to guide our visual perception. Unlike most directors, Tati considers sound to be as important as visuals. He is passionate about the need for magnetic sound projection and talks of having fought all his life for his soundtracks. Tati always shoots his films silent and post-synchronises them in a process which he describes as comparable to re-shooting the film: 'At this stage it is a silent film that I have at my disposal. It remains for me to "re-shoot" each scene, no longer for the images but for the sound. I give it great care. As a matter of fact, I consider sound as



Multiple reflections during Hulot's pursuit of M. Giffard

of capital importance.'

An analysis of a particular instance of the use of sound in *Playtime* will perhaps illuminate the reasons for Tati's seemingly inordinate care. At one point in the Royal Garden sequence we have a long-shot of a section of the restaurant; there are some tables and diners in the foreground. In the mid-ground we see a group of American women tourists sitting at a table. A waiter stands by their table partially obscured by a low dividing wall in which flowers are planted. We see the waiter take a step and then hear a loud rip on the soundtrack. As he comes out from behind the partition we notice a huge tear in his trousers.

Thus within the visual chaos of the long-shot we are urged to attend to this event through the subtle insistence of the sound. Often its almost subliminal influence is due to an imbalance of sound versus visual distance. In the example cited, the sound of the waiter's trousers ripping would indicate that he is nearer to us than the camera would allow. While the visuals are in long-shot the soundtrack is in acoustic close-up. Also, because of the post-dubbing phenomenon, each sound that Tati highlights has a totally concrete integrity and specificity. Thus, even though his soundtracks are often dense, each separate sound is isolated and distinct. Other examples abound within the film:

(1) At one point in the Royal Garden

segment we have seen Hulot shatter the restaurant's glass door and the doorman sweep the glass up. Quite a bit later we have a shot of the coat lady pouring the glass fragments into a box which the doorman holds. Next we cut to a visually dense long-shot of the bar and in the extreme corner of the frame the doorman can be seen to be pouring the glass into an ice bucket. (The restaurant, in its general disintegration, has obviously run out of ice.) The reason we attend to this minute detail is that the sound of the glass being poured into the bucket is purposefully accentuated.

(2) Later in the sequence, when the destruction of the restaurant is almost complete, we have a long-shot of various inebriated people in a corner of the restaurant. In the mélange of activity a man is seen putting a tablet into a glass of liquid. We hear (against an acoustic background of music, singing, talking, etc.) a loud fizzing sound indicating that the tablet is some variety of antacid. The man puts the drink down and Hulot walks into the frame. He sips it, grimaces and emits a loud gulping sound. It is no wonder that in the visual chaos we have 'chosen' to notice this small gag.

Both these examples have involved the use of abstracted and distorted sound effects to guide attention; however, Tati employs snatches of dialogue as well. What is ironic is that often, in the disjointed phrases that we pick up, characters literally command us to look at something:

(1) When Barbara and her party of tourists enter the chaos of the Royal Garden, we are helped to single her out by the fact that we hear bits of dialogue such as 'Look at that chemise!' or 'How dated!' Obviously they are pointed at the gauche style of her dress.

(2) When another group of tourist ladies enter the restaurant, they are posed in the foreground while various people pass in the background. At one point we hear a fragment of dialogue from one of the ladies ('Look over there'), and we notice a woman in haute couture garb literally gliding into the restaurant, an obvious caricature of smooth sophistication.

Certain sound-attention strategies are not so important in terms of a single shot but rather weave comic threads through the narrative. M. Giffard, for example, is noticed consistently for the loud sound of his tapping shoes; one of the Hulot 'doubles' is singled out for the sound he makes by abruptly slapping his newspaper under his arm; the fish-seasoning gag is frequently articulated through the loud grating sound of the pepper mill; and the theme of the uniformity of modern décor is advanced by the sound of a P.A. system which unifies the space of the airport, the exposition building and the tourist hotel.

The point is quite simply that *Playtime* without sound would be as incomprehensible as *Playtime* without colour. Partly this is due to the fact that much of Tati's comedy

is based on the nuances of aural caricature. But to a great extent the importance of sound in *Playtime* is tied to the manner in which it helps us to penetrate the density of the visual material. As Tati has said, 'I like to push my visual effect a little on the soundtrack...'

Another, though less compelling, manner in which Tati guides spectator attention is through camera movement. This seems surprising at first, because in general Tati shuns the conventional use of camera movement as irrelevant to his narrative interests. Because his emphasis (from *Mon Oncle* through *Traffic*) has been on the relation between characters and the contemporary environment, he finds the fixed frame generally more amenable to his comic vision. He has said: 'It is necessary that it be my actors who evolve; and it is not necessary that my camera move.'

Tati has also opposed elaborate camera movement on the basis that it imposes a structure on the viewer's experience: 'In the modern cinema one is much aware of camera movements and the spectator is often obliged to follow the director.' But perhaps the word 'aware' is significant here. For on examination of *Playtime*'s construction it becomes clear that what Tati opposes is not so much camera movement in itself as the awareness of camera movement. He has remarked, for example, of *Playtime*: 'A lot of people think the camera doesn't move at all; actually it does move, but *always to show you what your eye would naturally follow, so you don't notice*' (Italics mine.)

Here Tati has admitted perhaps more than he had meant to. He has assumed that he can show us what our eyes would naturally follow; and admitted that if he employs camera movement in a subtle enough fashion we will be unaware of its directive powers. How far are we from Bazin's discussion of the logic of 'invisible montage'? 'It is this logic which conceals the fact of analysis, the mind of the spectator quite naturally accepting the viewpoints of the director, which are justified by the geography of the action or the shifting emphasis of dramatic interest.'

A few shot descriptions from *Playtime* will suffice to illustrate this camera movement strategy:

(1) As the diminutive airport dignitary gets into his limousine and is about to be photographed by reporters, there is a diagonal tracking shot into the car. This prepares us for the immediate gag in which his chauffeur (and not the dignitary) smiles for the camera. It also ensures that we will notice the dignitary's face and get the joke a few sequences later of seeing his huge portrait on the office wall.

(2) When Hulot is waiting for M. Giffard in the office, we have a frontal long-shot of Hulot standing before the window looking out. Behind him we see M. Giffard leave. Hulot, of course, does not notice; but to ensure that *we* do the camera tracks a bit parallel to the man.

(3) As it becomes clear that the Royal Garden is having problems with the air conditioning system, the camera tracks into the bar at such an angle that it highlights the model airplane; of course, within seconds of the camera movement it begins to melt.

It is significant that in this last example the plane's wing is painted with a streak

of bright red. Thus Tati continually coordinates and orchestrates the attention-directing instruments of colour, camera movement and sound. While there is a 'rest' for one, the others continue to play; sometimes they play *ensemble*. The word 'ensemble' reminds one that the term for long-shot in French is 'plan-ensemble'. As an adverb, *ensemble* means 'together'. So long-shot in French contains the notion of the frame enclosing various things in relation to one another.

It is this conception of the long-shot that one must invoke in an examination of *Playtime*. Before we can conclude anything about the viewer's perceptual relation to the multiplicity of events depicted on the screen, it is necessary to consider the relationships established between the events themselves.

To pursue this it is useful to return to Bazin. In the opening quote concerning Bazin's claims for the effect of the long-take style on spectator consciousness, one sentence was omitted. It reads: 'It is from his [the spectator's] attention and his will that the meaning of the image in part derives.' What Bazin clearly has in mind here is to make another distinction between the long-take and montage traditions. Montage, Bazin would claim, imposes an interpretation upon us by using shots in contextual relationships to one another. Thus the close-up of a bowl of soup which follows the close-up of Moshukhin in Kuleshov's experiment establishes a clear context within which we must interpret his expression as 'hungry'.

The long-shot for Bazin, however, allows objects and events to exist as independent elements. Since analytical editing does not impose their interrelationships upon us, he concludes that the frame is 'ambiguous' and we must create meaning ourselves. (Bazin 'covers' himself by slipping in a disclaimer concerning how this does not follow 'of necessity' within the long-shot/long-take style, but the thrust of his argument implies that it does.) What Bazin unfortunately ignores is the simple fact that the kind of interpretative context he so abhors in its articulation through analytical montage can be established just as rigidly within the long-shot frame.

Tati gives us a clue to the problem in describing the kind of incident he likes to film. He begins by positing the hypothetical situation of a policeman stopping a driver for going through a red light: '...I add to this different passages involving people who stop, look, listen with diverse reactions, or have to make a detour on the pavement to avoid the group—*these are the multiple rapports* which already make me laugh. There is a woman who has just done some errands; she has left her dog at home and she is rushed, she makes a little impatient gesture... Nearby, there is a motorist, very calm, whom the traffic jam suits very well. He profits from it by being able to glance around to look at a young girl. You see how I proceed.' (Italics mine.)

Although this is only a hypothetical scenario, it is clear that the kind of multiple events in which Tati is interested are those replete with 'multiple rapports'. Thus the woman's impatient gesture is not funny in itself but rather in the context of our seeing the opposite reaction on the part of the

womanising man nearby. Whether shot in montage or long-shot/long-take, the relationship between events is clear.

It is this type of structure that informs the composition of many long-shot/long-takes within *Playtime*. And it is only by establishing context and deciphering the connection between 'events' within the shot that the humour and logic of the film is available to the viewer. Let us take a few specific examples. Tati himself speaks of the shot in which the plane melts at the Royal Garden bar: 'If I had shot a close-up of the plane everyone would have seen it, but it is not a gag for the sake of a gag. It is a plane which melts because the people are warm. It is necessary therefore to see them at the same time at the bar in the process of perspiring; *it is part of an ensemble*. One has the cause and the effect in the same shot.' Tati is, of course, a bit misguided in his notions of cause and effect (as all true comics should be); nevertheless one gets the sense of how the events within the frame form 'part of an ensemble', establish a context for one another. For Tati humour is contained not within the dynamics of a single event but rather in complex patterns of interaction that exist between several events. Thus the melting plane is not so much humorous in itself as in its peculiarly sympathetic relation to the discomfort of the restaurant guests.

But let us explore an even clearer example. In some prints of *Playtime*, there is a sequence in which Hulot meets an old friend who invites him to his apartment. Ironically, M. Giffard, whom Hulot has been constantly pursuing, lives next door. Tati situates the camera outside on the street facing the two huge picture windows which frame these two ground floor apartments. A split-screen effect is achieved as we watch the simultaneous events in each apartment. But the entire interest and humour in this long-shot segment lies in establishing connections between the two. If one looks at only half the screen one misses everything. In order to 'get' the joke it is necessary to encompass both. There is, first of all, the joke that apartment living allows us to be ignorant of who is next door; there is the humour involved in seeing each group of people in each apartment sit as though facing one another, glued to television sets on either side of their adjoining wall; there is a gag when Hulot in one apartment bows with his *derrière* to the adjoining wall and the people in the next apartment (who are looking at something shocking on television) react as though offended by his gesture. What we have here is after all no simple two-ring circus.

A final example of this strategy occurs in a shot of the lobby of the tourist hotel. We see a group of returning tourists ascend an escalator in retreat to their rooms, while next to them a group of tourists descend to go out on the town. The returning tourists are disgruntled and tired; the flowers on the ladies' hats droop. Those leaving are high with the expectation of a night at the Royal Garden; the flowers on the ladies' hats are pert and upright. Obviously, the humour in this shot resides largely in the comparison between the two events, rather than in the discrete perception of either one.

Thus Tati's humour is fundamentally

based on juxtaposition. The long-shot format must therefore be seen not merely in terms of the issue of spectator freedom, but rather in terms of its crucial role in accommodating Tati's particularly expansive comic vision. Significantly, in explaining why he avoids close-ups in framing objects and characters, Tati has said: 'Why isolate their relationships, what they have that is typical, that is common.' To put it another way, Tati's humour is largely one of montage and his mode of long-shot construction is one of highly conscious montage within the shot. Because of this tight comparative structure, one's random perusal of the frame is qualified and certain paths of attention are consistently suggested.

Playtime has revealed to us a catalogue of attention-getting strategies that can function quite nicely within the long-take style. It has also revealed a director who has quite clearly mastered that catalogue. And if we leave a screening elated by our complete autonomy in that experience, we should perhaps take heed of the cynical advice of Jean-Jacques Rousseau: 'Let [the child] believe that he is always in control, though it is always you [the teacher] who really controls. There is no subjugation so perfect as that which keeps the appearance of freedom...' To some extent, in entering the world of a Tati film we encounter the 'democracy' of style that critics like Jonathan Rosenbaum have acclaimed. But we should not be surprised to discover at the helm of that purported democratic ship of state a marvellously benevolent despot. ■

This article is based on a paper delivered to the Society for Cinema Studies, April 1975.

AFTERWORD

by Jonathan Rosenbaum

As a supplement to Lucy Fischer's important article, I'd like to offer three points which seem worth noting in any comprehensive account of the film in relation to an audience's real or imagined freedom.

(1) All the examples of 'benevolent' despotism cited above—whether effected by colour, sound or camera movements—are, it is true, designed to urge the spectator to 'notice' certain things. (One might add to this list the use of dummies and/or cut-out figures in addition to real extras in the backgrounds of certain shots—visible, for instance, in the still on this page.) But just as clearly, they are designed to *divert* the spectator from other things, some of which later develop into events or gags which take one entirely by surprise. During the later stages of the Royal Garden festivities, one gag at the bar is repeated twice: a drunk and the stool he is sitting on simultaneously crash to the floor when he leans back too far. What makes this event a great deal funnier the first and third time it happens is its unexpectedness; amidst a flurry of other focal points, Tati's *mise en scène* has insured that we notice its occurrence only *after* we hear the crash, interrupting our attention elsewhere and immediately refocusing it. The third occurrence, for example, interrupts Hulot's efforts in the foreground to give another



Tati's view of the office as egg-box. The figures outside in the street are dummies

drunk street directions—a detail which itself plays on confusions, as the young man's fingers trace beyond a *plan de Paris* to the similarly patterned pillar he is holding it against. (As a play on the continuity and discontinuity of separate 'signs', this gag, like countless others, parodies our own organisational capacities while watching the film.)

Another example occurs much earlier at the Royal Garden, and although it is not a 'gag' in any ordinary sense, it has come to represent for me one of the most beautiful moments in all cinema: the instant that the first of the restaurant's bands starts to play. How could such a fleeting detail seem so extraordinary? Because over repeated viewings of the film I have nearly always been unable to anticipate this instant even by a fraction of a second; each time, Tati's complex strategies—which include his unobtrusive time abridgements—have contrived to prevent me from taking notice of the musicians' assembly on the bandstand. In short, the film is predicated on one's *inattentiveness* as much as one's attentiveness, which in turn affects one's sense of real or imagined freedom. After missing a detail, one naturally concludes that one *could* have chosen to see it, and tries to become more vigilant in anticipating future surprises, playing a sort of guessing-game that is ironically more fun to lose than to win.

(2) Between those areas on the screen which one is encouraged to 'notice' or 'not notice' are other areas where the emphasis is more unstable and shifting—a terrain perhaps best described by Noël Burch in *Cahiers du Cinéma* No. 199 as that of the 'refused gag', where a gag that has been 'started in one sequence, completed in another, developed in a third and repeated in a fourth' can be 'refused in a fifth'. This teasing 'promise' of a gag that is never quite delivered comes in many forms (a random example: the street worker's slabs of cement which *almost* splatter a well-dressed lady pedestrian), and is a crucial

part of Tati's tactics, whereby the mere *possibility* or preparation of a gag alters the overall dynamics of the image and soundtrack.

(3) Repeated viewings have a very special bearing on the extent of a spectator's 'real' freedom in relation to *Playtime*. Although the falling drunk on the bar-stool has made my own 'controlled' inattention the virtual subject of a gag in Tati's terms, the gag has never been experienced twice in the same way because the degrees of relative attention and awareness have fluctuated with each viewing. However firm Tati's guidelines may be in 'directing' attention, one nevertheless acquires increasing freedom in how much one willingly submits to this pressure as one increases one's familiarity with the film.

Indeed, a paradoxical aspect of *Playtime's* fascination is that it yields up its greatest treasures only *after* one becomes aware of its brilliantly deceptive manipulations and begins to chart one's own *mise en scène* in relation to Tati's—a collaborative act that combines the rigorous work of a land-surveyor with the improvisational play of a tourist. (A central function to the film's use of music is to provide a rhythmical 'anchor' and guideline to the spectator in plotting out his or her movements in this activity; it enables one to experience the process of observation itself as a kind of spontaneous, joyous and continuous dance.) Even here, it goes without saying that one's freedom operates within well-defined constraints: the fact that Tati's *mise en scène* remains necessarily stronger than one's own. All existing democracies, one might add, exhibit comparable ambiguities about freedom. But if one familiarises oneself with the powers that be—a step few citizens seem willing to take—one can participate in the decision-making process with open eyes, receptive ears and an active mind. Within these conditions, Tati functions rather less as a 'benevolent despot' and somewhat more as a duly elected official. ■

FESTIVALS '76



Oshima's 'Empire of the Senses'

Locarno

'Sodom and Gomorrah,' screamed a German newspaper headline, above a report which also claimed that the class war was being fought in every reel of film and what must the money-spinning tourists think about finding themselves in the middle of a 'red' festival. Over-reaction was endemic at Locarno this year, reflecting perhaps a general disappointment in the films and a particular frustration that the police didn't after all break up the screenings of Pasolini's *Salò* and Oshima's *Empire of the Senses*. Cannes and Berlin, it seemed, had stolen the thunder of sensation. Meanwhile, regularly descending from the mountains, the actual thunder clapped cynically, washing out half the open-air screenings.

Pasolini's last film is a bleak testament. Transposing de Sade's *120 Days of Sodom* to Mussolini's short-lived Fascist republic of *Salò* in 1943, it has about it the smell of death—an ultimate, abstracted dirge for humanity in the last throes of degradation and despair. For the original's God, Pasolini has substituted power: a quartet of sado-masochists, bastions of society, systematically humiliate, abuse and torture a group of adolescent boys and girls procured for the purpose. This orgiastic torment, initiated by a series of obscene anecdotes related by a trio of awesome ladies in crinolines, is cloaked in ritual, an aspect emphasised both by the setting (a villa) and the uninflected, bleached out photography. The progression

is relentless, from sodomy through excremental sadism to death by torture. There is no pleasure for the torturers; and there is no pity.

The film is structured, after Dante, round three cycles, whose formal precision is reflected in the deadening sense of rite and regimentation. From the distance thus achieved the metaphor emerges all the more forcefully: that fascism, symbolised here by the total subjugation of the sexual victims, is merely the ultimate expression of a tendency latent (and to Pasolini ineradicable) in every power system which depends—as all power systems do—on the submission of the many to the few. It is an overwhelmingly pessimistic vision, desolate and depressing; and one which we must surely reject, even at the price of illusion. At any event, I left the film—perforce—just before the end, as a girl was about to be scalped. In a way, that might be a tribute to more than the film's own appalling power.

Pasolini's film got to the guts, in more than one sense. Next to it, other attempts to confront the problem of political power, whether metaphorically or not, seemed mere gestures of dissent. Most articulate was Alexander Kluge's *Der starke Ferdinand*. A parable about the logic of obsession, Kluge's new film is also his most accessible. Ferdinand (Heinz Schubert) is a policeman turned factory security chief, one of society's official guardians who takes his job more than seriously. Installing a battery of sophisticated security devices, and recruiting a

platoon of guards whom he regularly surprises at dead of night with military exercises to test their mettle, he applies himself to his largely self-appointed task with a fervour approaching the messianic. Catching an employee pilfering, he persuades her to share his (single) bed, where he can keep an eye on her; no one, not even the boss, is above suspicion. His enthusiasm is embarrassing enough to get him fired, whereupon he proves his case by shooting a politician in broad daylight. The film is caricatural, in the Kluge fashion, but leavened by a characteristically dry, mock-didactic irony of tone and observation.

A Swiss film, Francis Reusser's *Le Grand Soir*, also features a security man, and might have benefited from Kluge's irony. Léon meets Léa and joins her Leninist cell. Their relationship strained by the obligations of revolutionary dialectic (they talk a lot), he opts for action by stealing some arms. Collectively denounced for this premature decisiveness, he is expelled from the group and arrested—a genuine threat to a society which sanctions the talk-shop revolutionaries. The acknowledged influence here is Godard, circa *La Chinoise*, all white walls and uncluttered images; but the two comic, trench-coated policemen who drift conspicuously through the end of the film seem to have wandered out of Chabrol.

Reusser's film took the main prize. For its closer engagement in the political debate, I preferred Alain Tanner's *Jonas qui aura 25 ans en l'an 2000*, which was shown out of competition. Co-scripted by the director and John Berger, and liberally quoting from a crop of writers as separate in time and sentiment as Rousseau and Adrian Mitchell, this is a fable for the times and accurately represents a number of contemporary confusions. A group of people from various backgrounds, accidentally brought together and alliteratively named, pass in and out of each other's lives and hopes. They make up a collage of options (figuratively enshrined in a child's wall drawing of them, which unconsciously mocks the poses they adopt), all the way from tantric mystification to political opportunism. A teacher is obsessed with the lessons of history, a farmer thinks animals are more interesting than people, a supermarket cashier has her own notion of what things should cost. Intercut with newsreels (May 1968, May Day in Red Square), and periodically slipping into black and white to confront illusion with the reality of choice, it is a film of marginal notes rather than sustained argument, and as such catches the current mood with precision.

A third Swiss film, Thomas Koerfer's *Der Gehülfe*, is more of a piece. From a novel by Robert Walser, it is set at the turn of the century and concerns a young man employed as clerk and general assistant to an inventor whose confidence in his creations far exceeds his chance of selling them. Unwillingly, and at first unwittingly, the clerk finds himself taking over the household, keeping creditors from the door and advising his employer's wife on family matters. But there is no money in the job (there is none to pay), and he finally leaves the rambling lakeside house to join the burgeoning ranks of the unemployed. Koerfer's film unfolds at its own pace: undemonstrative, measured, registering every nuance of décor and gesture with

a controlled subtlety of tone which reminds one at times of Rohmer.

The Iranian Sohrab Shahid Saless is another director whose unaccented style masks a subtle perspective on the unexceptional. **Reifezeit**, his second film made in Germany, is another minute observation of the simple events of everyday life. A boy lives with his mother, goes to school, shops for a blind neighbour. The mother works nights in a bar; the boy takes himself to and from school. There is very little dialogue since the two of them have very little to say to each other, existing from day to day within the enclosing walls of their small routines. As in his previous films, Saless simply fixes his camera in very long takes on his settings and characters, never interposing himself between what happens and why. It is a style so refined that it runs the risk of seeming pointless, but its uncompromising simplicity finally achieves an almost hypnotic effect; and in the process speaks volumes about the way people actually live.

Two other German films are worth mentioning. Max Willutzki's **Vera Romeyke ist nicht tragbar** is a straightforward account of a schoolteacher caught between her own wish to give her mainly working-class children some notion of the factory work which almost certainly awaits them and the local authority's interpretation of what she does (a classroom simulation of a production line) as politically motivated. Willutzki hedges his bets somewhat—the teacher is a member of the SPD, but not active—but the educational debate is accurately registered, and the general message about the limits placed on freedom of expression by a society which claims to uphold it rings loud and clear. Helma Sanders' **Shirins Hochzeit** is similarly unadorned, a detailed report on the decline and fall of a Turkish girl who goes to Germany to find the man she loves. The symptoms of culture shock are meticulously, even methodically, recorded as the girl finds a job, loses it when as a foreign worker she is no longer needed, and gradually drifts into prostitution. In the end, she is shot by a pimp in a bleak cityscape which is a cold correlative for a society whose values have destroyed her; in the context it is an unnecessary punctuation mark.

America sent three portraits of itself. Bob Rafelson's **Stay Hungry** is reviewed elsewhere. Michael Miller's **Jackson County Jail** is comic-strip from the Corman stable, with Yvette Mimieux as a nice middle-class lady who foolishly decides to drive across country and pays for her folly by being robbed on the road, raped in jail, and obliged to watch wide-eyed as her rescuer on the run ('I was born dead') is shot down in the middle of a small town bicentennial parade. There was quiet relief in **Pleasantville**, directed by Kenneth Locker and Vicki Polon, a slight but sympathetic portrait of a little girl confronted by the inexplicable fact of her grandmother's death. The grandmother is Gale Sondergaard, making the most of a part barely etched by the script.



Alain Tanner's 'Jonas qui aura 25 ans en l'an 2000'

The only British film was a controversial curio, Paul Humphreys and Derek Jarman's **Sebastiane**. This is a study of sexuality (exclusively male), set mainly by the sea on the fringes of a Roman military outpost in the third century; and with pretensions enough to have its dialogue entirely in Latin, with the English subtitles having occasional anachronistic fun at the expense of such as Cecil B. DeMille and Mary Whitehouse (Maria Domus Alba, of course). Sebastian is the future saint, stuck with arrows by his fellow soldiers because he rejects the love of the camp commander. A serious purpose is undermined by a serious lack of structure in a film which never decides whether it wants to be more than a visual celebration of the naked male. As Douglas Sirk, a regular visitor to Locarno, aptly commented, those boys are just too damned pretty.

DAVID WILSON

Berlin

Over the years, the main film event at Berlin seems to have determined that its role as an 'international' festival is to turn film into a kind of blandly negotiable diplomatic currency. Right across the map, the competition entries look less like competitors than the staples of a giant UNESCO layer cake, irreproachably humanist in content, irredeemably conservative in style. The tendency may even have been accelerated by the Festival's latterday efforts to encourage entries from East European countries, who have been conspicuously eager to blend historical and political experiences with romantic fiction, perhaps to put an acceptable face on Socialism.

A children's film from the U.S.S.R., **The White Steamer**, was as ethnically unfamiliar (in its unplaceable landscapes and genuinely exotic people) as it was artistically



Pantelis Voulgaris' 'Happy Day', shown at Locarno. Set on a Greek prison island under the Colonels' regime, the film is less a reconstruction than an allegorical reflection on the psychology of internment on a windswept island where resistance is broken by futile acts of discipline

shopworn in its precocious whimsy; the Polish blockbuster, Jerzy Antczak's **Nights and Days**, was textbook East-meets-West, a saga of farming folk at the turn of the century that crossed the emotional tetchiness of Chekhov with the lumbering lyricism of Ken Russell. A Spanish film, **The Long Holidays of 1936**, directed by Jaime Camino, dealt more substantially with a middle-class crisis of confidence and conscience; it records the leisure classes dithering, with increasing discomfort, through the Spanish Civil War, unable to identify their interests with either side. But the drama is steadily resolved into trite anti-war sentiment; tensions remain unsharpened, and the film basically concentrates on creating sufficient sympathy for everyone involved to hold its attenuated TV-serial structure together. From Iran, Parviz Kimiavi's **Garden of Stone** was at least visually more arresting, but this strange tale of a deaf-mute peasant suddenly being seized by a religious mission to construct an elaborate monument of stone soon lost the courage of its surrealist images and succumbed to frothy allegory.

It's ironic that the greatest excitement at the Festival was provoked by a breach of international protocol. After its overflowing *succès de scandale* at Cannes, Nagisa Oshima's **Empire of the Senses** was screened by the Festival's 'Young Forum', and was then promptly seized by the authorities. This violation of a tradition (which seems to have no legal basis) granting festival films extra-territorial immunity from local obscenity laws caused the Forum some embarrassment. More serious, of course, is the precedent that is created if (as now appears likely) both the film and the Forum's director are brought to court. The charge would not strictly be one of obscenity: what has provoked official ire is not so much the sexual explicitness as its conjugation with violence and death (the hero finally acquiesces in being strangled by his partner as the ultimate orgasm).

About the film itself, Richard Roud has already written rather discouragingly from Cannes. But what Oshima has achieved, apart from a catalogue of inventive coupling, is a strangely intense yet allusive political commentary. The real-life events on which the film is based took place at the seed-time (circa 1936) of Japanese expansionism, a fact which is acknowledged in the film's English and French title and in the predominance of the colour red. Their implications are brought together in one of the few exterior shots, when the hero is seen briefly in the street and a squad of soldiers pass by bearing the insignia of the rising sun. As if holding a mirror up to the future, the film then observes the self-immolation of such masculine codes of dominance. Within the carefully described minutiae of a domestic setting of all-consuming devotion and service, and before the onslaught of a female sexuality whose revelation in the original case apparently had great impact in Japan, the hero becomes perhaps the first *kamikaze*.

The political critique of *Empire of the Senses* is a dark thread running through this hothouse of *amour fou*. In Robert Altman's **Buffalo Bill and the Indians** (reviewed elsewhere in this issue), it is running all too clearly on the surface. Derived from Arthur Kopit's play *Indians*, the film's conceit of



Jaime Camino's 'The Long Holidays of 1936'

white America's Western conquest as a show-biz sham remains too limited to be enlivened by Altman's standard deployment of wayward faces and wandering gags, or to be developed by Paul Newman's sprightly bemusement as the dime novel hero. But at least it served as some kind of antidote to the bicentennial blues brought on by **America at the Movies**. This product of George Stevens Jr. and the American Film Institute brings together a more heterogeneous collection of clips than the two *Entertainments* combined. Organised round five chapter headings that have all the monumental resonance of Mt. Rushmore (The Land, The Cities, The Families, The Wars, The Spirit), the film pretends to neither a historical nor a sociological account of the myths that made the movies, but renders them down to basic platitudes ('It began with a dream, a candle in the mind,' intones the narrator behind opening immigrant footage from *America, America* and *The Godfather*).

To the displeasure of many people, *Buffalo Bill* carried off the Festival's first prize; though against the rest of the competition, even this minor Altman conceivably looked like a winner. As far as anything could be said to be a hot favourite, it was probably François Truffaut's **Pocket Money**. Although in most respects a conventional feature, with discernible threads of a story, this also seemed to be something of a compilation: a large cast of children, who appear to have only their school in common, are let loose on various pranks and bits of business. At its best, the result is a sort of roily rasping *Zéro de Conduite*, trying a little too hard to charm; at its worst, it is no more than a platform for the amateur theatrics of its precocious moppets. For the most part, the film looks idly, weakly imitative of Truffaut, especially in its treatment of the neglected outsider—the 'wild child' who makes a dramatically ragged entrance in the middle of the playground, and returns each evening to unseen but evidently unkind guardians in a derelict shack. As if to make up for the undemanding feyness of the rest of the film, Truffaut concludes this episode with an into-camera lecture by a teacher on the proper respect for children.

The Retrospective this year proved a dependable if unexciting event. The continuing Conrad Veidt season proceeded through the delicious twists and turns of *The Man Who Laughs*, the heavily engineered star vehicle of *Rasputin*, and the

lugubrious melodramatics of *Jew Süss*. A complementary season on the neglected German cinema of the late 1920s and early 1930s deservedly dusted off such items as Robert Siodmak's *Abschied* and *Voruntersuchung*, but failed to put too much of a shine on the period as a whole. The same might be said of the resurrected vehicles of dancer Eleanor Powell, whose films tend to sparkle (one or two in the *Broadway Melody* series) only to the extent that reliable supports (Judy Garland, Buddy Ebsen) strike most of the sparks. Otherwise, the star's stiffly metronomic style is keyed all too well to the military hardware which seems to spread even beyond the propaganda orbit of her wartime features. Both *Born to Dance* (1936) and *I Dood It* (1943) wheel on a battleship (what looks in fact like the same battleship, with the same choreography) for the climactic number; and in the dreary *Rosalie*, the star's chorus line mostly consists of West Point cadets.

The most fascinating revivals took place outside the main retrospective event, in the two programmes of early D. W. Griffith subjects that appeared in the Forum. These constituted a primer of Griffith's cross-cutting techniques, usually at the service of an inflexible dramatic routine which allowed the heroine to lock one outer and one inner door between herself and the villains while the hero raced to the rescue; but *A Corner in Wheat* (1909) and *The Musketeers of Pig Alley* (1913) also revealed quite sophisticated parallels and interactions based on social and psychological themes.

Another pioneer is exhaustively given his due in **Eadweard Muybridge, Zoopraxographer**, an account of the life and work of the eccentric Englishman who experimented with multiple-exposure photography as a means of analysing animal and human movement. Muybridge's investigations have earned him credit as one of the midwives attending the birth of cinema, although he did so in a rather inadvertent, unaware fashion, and the delivery really took place elsewhere. But Thom Anderson's careful, scholarly approach comprehends without difficulty both the isolated eccentricity of the man and the scientific rigour with which he created and explored his own speciality in this wholly undefined field.

Somewhat surprisingly, cinema reflecting on itself and its procedures proved a more varied and rewarding subject in this year's Forum than the predictable political topics. A Hungarian film, **Labyrinth**, directed by András Kovács, worried in a faintly old-fashioned but intelligently modest way over problems of truth and illusion, and the political dimension of relating a director's vision to his work within a group; **Bertolucci's Cinema**, a record by Gianni Amelio of the filming of *1900*, made amusing and at times it would seem quite inadvertent play with the fog of myth that surrounds the director (and the historical myth that surrounds his latest project); and Jonas Mekas' **Diaries, Notes & Sketches** recounted with what can only be described as baroque naiveté the story of his upbringing as a member of New York's Lithuanian community, and his involvement with the film-making underground as one of the priests, in his own words, of the 'new order of cinema'.

RICHARD COMBS

During his trip to Budapest last year, the representative of the San Francisco Film Festival was strongly discouraged by several members of the movie community from seeing *The Unfinished Sentence*, the latest film by Zoltán Fábri. He was told that the movie was too long and too traditional. The reaction seemed surprising not simply because Fábri is one of the leading Hungarian directors, but because the movie was the adaptation of one of the most important socialist novels of Hungary and had received the Special Jury Award at the Moscow Festival. *The Unfinished Sentence* by Tibor Déry is a vast volume which attempts to mirror Hungarian society in the 1930s through the stories of various members of an old established aristocratic-industrialist family. That the film was received with such indifference is an indication of the discomfort Hungarians feel when confronted with 'yet another' film with an historical subject, 'yet another' film depicting the class struggle.

To understand their reaction, we must understand the experience of Hungarian film audiences since World War II. During the years of Stalinist autocracy the cinema was also enlisted in the struggle to transform society. The doctrine of socialist realism was applied to all the arts, resulting in predictable stories with predictable endings featuring predictable heroes. They portrayed the struggle of the workers to rid themselves of their exploiters. Often that meant a traditional war story, since World War II offered the most clear-cut confrontation between good and evil, the bastion of socialism attacked by Nazism, the vilest, most degenerate form of capitalism, which

was seen not simply as a variant, but the quintessence of that decadent order under which the rest of the world suffered. Historical movies abounded, since here was a new terrain to show the struggle of slaves against their masters, serfs against lords, peasants against foreign burghers, workers against factory owners and, of course, Reds against Whites in the October Revolution, the first and most glorious of conflicts fought in modern times against the omnipresent oppressors. But the movies dealt with more contemporary problems as well. The struggle to establish a new order had to be illustrated. Time and again the efforts of dedicated peasants and workers, to col-

lectivise the land or increase production, are frustrated by scheming, corpulent kulaks and treacherous bourgeois collaborating with unspecified foreign interests. Despite certain setbacks, even deaths of brave individuals, the cause triumphs: the new order relentlessly marches on, sweeping aside those bizarre and anachronistic opponents of progress.

In these films the new man of the new order emerged, predicated by the pronouncements of Andrei Zhdanov, the Central Committee's 'expert' on cultural affairs and architect of the rigid formulations of socialist realism under Stalin. He was a new social superman, possessing ideological conviction, courage, intelligence, will-power, patriotism, respect for women, self-sacrifice; in short, a political version of the purposeful hero prescribed by the influential nineteenth century Russian critic Chernyshevsky. If he had any faults, they existed only to help preserve a certain likeness to real men and to provide him with obstacles which he would overcome in the process of self-perfection. He was the positive hero, 'a peak of humanity from whose height the future can be seen,' according to Leonid Leonov, a highly respected writer under Stalinism.

The formulas of socialist realism began to be replaced in film as much as twenty years ago by graduates of the Lodz school in Poland, who did away with the extreme stereotypes of Zhdanovist art in their attempts to present a more complex and ambiguous reality. Andrzej Wajda set his film *Ashes and Diamonds* on the eve of liberation, introducing the struggle for power among all anti-Nazi factions and presenting a range of characters who escape ready political pigeon-holing. Cybulski's Maciek is the sympathetic protagonist in spite of the fact that he is fighting for the nationalist guerrillas with the aim of killing the local Communist Party chief. Naturally Maciek was portrayed as politically ignorant, misled by the superiors whose orders he blindly follows, but that did not detract from his appeal. On the contrary, Cybulski became the Polish James Dean, a rebel, not a revolutionary, who met a similar untimely death in a railroad accident. He embodied the negative values of a highly purposeful, 'straight' society, an antidote to the positive ideals of the post-war years which prevailed on both sides of the Iron Curtain.

With the relaxing of the rigid rules that governed the arts, more and more adventurous films began to appear in Eastern Europe. It was in Czechoslovakia, the country which was inching its way to sovereignty, that experiments in the arts went furthest. In the mid-1960s a number of Czech films not only challenged the stylistic conventions of socialist realism but also the very rationale of Soviet-style communism. In Vera Chytilova's *Daisies* the two went hand in hand: formalistic experiments with fast motion, rapid colour changes, jump cuts, rapid montage were vehicles for revealing the anarchic spirit of the story, which centres around the idle, egotistic play of two friends, ending in an orgy of gluttony, food fights and destruction. A more straightforward critique of Soviet-style regimentation was presented in Jan Nemec's *A Report on the Party and the*

The case of 'The Unfinished Sentence'

BEYOND SOCIALIST REALISM

Steven Kovács

'The Unfinished Sentence': '... the positive hero of yesteryear (Mrs Rózsa) and the introspective hero of today (Lörinc)'



Guests, a parable about conformity in which a group of picnickers are forced to join a lavish feast, which they do without resistance.

The fresh air that revived the arts encouraged freer political discussion, but not for long. The Warsaw Pact troops that entered Prague in August 1968 put an end to the freest vein of political and cultural discourse anywhere in Eastern Europe. Once again after Hungary, Moscow's level of tolerance had been reached. The forceful ending of the Czech experiment reminded the entire Soviet bloc of the limits within which the business of a nation had to be conducted.

In the arts, those limits had always been understood. An occasional trespass into forbidden territory quickly triggered official opprobrium. The Czechoslovak example merely confirmed the existence of certain tabus. In gross terms, nothing that was directly critical of the regime could be included. On the other hand, Zhdanovist mistrust of stylistic experimentation was a thing of the past. As long as a film's political line was correct, the most baroque camera and narrative techniques could be used. But the important change since the death of Stalin has been the expansion of what was considered politically acceptable. The withering away of socialist realism left room for a new mode of film-making which opened the door to previously proscribed authors and themes.

Yet the years of Stalinist oppression left their mark on the consciousness of nations. Today, political manifestations in the arts tend to be viewed either with suspicion or indifference. Hungary is a case in point. Since the failure of the 1956 Revolution, Hungarians have made a conscious effort to leave politics to the party and the state and dedicate themselves to the acquisition of a higher standard of living. The Revolution and its aftermath are merely the most recent example of the mercurial excesses of Hungarian temperament. Traditionally, passionate, idealistic uprisings have been followed by long periods of abject apathy. Pockets of heroic resistance against the Turks gave way to a century and a half of total submission. The two hundred years of Habsburg domination were interrupted only by Rákóczi's hapless war of independence in the early 1700s and the bloody revolution of 1848. Once again in the last twenty years, Hungarians substituted hard-headed rationality for a heart-rending idealism in pursuing the accessible material goals of a more affluent society. That natural tendency has been assisted by policies of the Kádár regime: detoxify the atmosphere of unrest in the years after the uprising by distracting the people from a concern with political issues and substituting for ideological fervour an emphasis on increased material well-being. Kádár replaced the atmosphere of suspicion of non-party members in the Stalinist years with the dictum, 'All are with us who are not against us.' As a result, Hungarians today are at the apex of material comfort and the nadir of political concern in Eastern Europe.

It should come as no surprise that Hungarians are not especially eager to see movies which depict the class struggle, no matter how sophisticated the treatment may

be. And certainly the tiresome formulas of socialist realism have been effectively replaced in *The Unfinished Sentence* without abandoning a Marxist view. The film's protagonist is Lörinc Parcen-Nagy, handsome young scion of an industrialist family. Like Sergio of the Cuban film *Memories of Underdevelopment*, Lörinc is a product of his class, embodying its values and living in the style prescribed for him. He is as sensitive a character as Sergio, and that is his spiritual salvation. By being open to the lives of those around him, he begins to empathise with the workers. He has an affair with a Communist Party organiser, helps out the family of an injured labourer and offers to take a worker's son under his wing. But his predicament is much like that of Sergio: he remains a sympathetic but ineffectual bystander in a conflict where sides must be taken. Empathy with the workers is not enough: political action is required. That point is clearly made in the way Lörinc dies. Deserting his company in 1944, he is captured and executed; an act motivated by moral outrage remains futile, for it is not used constructively to further the Party's struggle against Nazism.

What is significant in the movie as a

Rózsa tells Lörinc of the way workers live, the way they struggle against oppression. In this conversation we see the confrontation not just of worker and aristocrat, but of the positive hero of yesteryear and the introspective hero of today. With great effort ('I can only think slowly, and you confuse me if you interrupt') but incisive clarity, she presents an ultra-leftist position that comes not from thought, but experience. Her hatred of the bourgeoisie is a gut feeling, implanted by a lifetime of poverty and police harassment: 'Marx writes that one should not hate the capitalists personally, but Marx was not a proletarian, and he did not know what it means always having to be on the defensive. If somebody can write books, he is not a real prole.'

The confrontation between Lörinc and Mrs. Rózsa reveals a basic contradiction of contemporary Hungarian society. While the Party still insists on the presentation of a correct ideology through the words and deeds of positive heroes, the public is interested in characters like themselves whose political beliefs are either non-existent or at best hazy. But because Party policy is to embrace whatever is popular, precisely in order to avoid any conflict between popular



Zoltán Huszárik's 'Sindbad': 'the concern with visual riches . . .'

change in the mode of socialist film is the replacement of the positive hero by a sensitive but uncommitted protagonist, a change from an ideal to a realistic character, from simplicity to ambiguity. That shift does not mean the elimination of positive heroes from the film, but rather their relegation to secondary roles. They appear among the oppressed workers of Csepel, most clearly designated in the haggard Mrs. Rózsa, wife of a worker, whose Communist activities have caused her to be arrested countless times. At the end of the story, after having worked in his deceased father's factory, Lörinc attempts to assuage his upper-class guilt by visiting her and offering to adopt her son Peter. She throws him out for having the impudence to offer her charity. Stammering, Lörinc asks to be let back into the dark and dingy tenement apartment, with the timid appeal that 'You can give me at least a half hour, if you have dedicated your whole life to the proletariat.' Her anger somewhat dissipated, Mrs.

will, no matter how inchoate, and governmental decree, it is no longer imperative for the story to focus on the representative of the working class. Yet just because the positive hero is no longer the main character, it is possible to depict her all the more strongly, since her extraordinary qualities are not unduly magnified by being the centre of attention. As a result, the positive hero that Chernyshevsky described, that the October Revolution politicised, and that Stalinism made the staple of artistic consumption has been preserved intact in the films of Eastern Europe without, paradoxically, hampering the evolution of political film from the formulas of socialist realism.

It is especially curious what the origins of these politics are. The movie is, after all, an extremely accurate adaptation of the book written during the 1930s by an author from a well-to-do family with pronounced leanings towards socialism. It was with *The Unfinished Sentence*, in fact, that Tibor Déry

moved to a strongly political position in his writings. His friend George Lukács has called this work the one with which 'the image of capitalist society in Hungary of the imperialist epoch makes its appearance in world literature, with its cortège of abominations and social and human contradictions...'. Yet neither Déry nor Lukács enjoyed an untrammelled existence under the socialist order which ended those abominations.

Déry first became a thorn in the side of socialism when in 1952 his novel *The Answer* was denounced for presenting the Communist Party of the inter-war years in a less than heroic light. In June 1956 he led the writers of the Petöfi Circle in the denunciation of members of the Central Committee 'who had imposed the rule of terror over the mind.' He guaranteed the students the support of the writers in Petöfi Square on that fateful day of October 23, 1956. Predictably, after the crushing of the revolution, he was arrested and imprisoned for two and a half years. With Kádár's policy of erasing the bitter memory of the fighting, his writings began to appear in journals in 1962. Recently he has written screenplays, including one for Károly Makk's much



'The Unfinished Sentence': affluence in the 1930s

acclaimed *Love*. With the adaptation of his most important novel to the screen by one of Hungary's leading directors, he has been not only fully rehabilitated, but has been permanently fixed in the pantheon of Hungary's great socialist authors.

The reasons for the making of the movie are twofold. First, the book has become a classic of socialist fiction since its publication more than thirty years ago. Ever since the days of the October Revolution, it has been customary for socialist countries to honour their classics by turning them into films. *The Unfinished Sentence* had already achieved great popularity in the 1950s. As soon as its author's political irregularities were pardoned, the road was cleared for the final legitimatising step of making it into a movie. Second and more important, the book presents an ideology that is harmonious with that of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party, or at least does not run counter to it. That ideology simultaneously satisfies the guardians of the nation's political consciousness whose orthodoxy must be appeased and the majority of commodity hungry Hungarians who wish to feast their eyes on the aristocratic extravaganza of a bygone era.

Remnants of the days of aggressive agitation appear not only in the positive heroes who have been preserved intact in minor roles, but also in a massive strike scene where the workers spontaneously burst into

a chorus of the *Internationale*, only to be dispersed by a detachment of sword-wielding gendarmes. Deplorable working conditions are suggested in scenes at the factory, including one where a stalwart comrade is injured in an industrial accident. The choice of the ending reveals the continuing need to emphasise the role of labourers in contemporary Hungarian cinema. The final scene is the confrontation between Lörinc and Mrs. Rózsa already described, which leads to Lörinc's thrashing by a young lumpenprol. These concluding scenes are lifted from the middle of the novel in order to emphasise class antagonism at its most basic — personal confrontation.

What strikes the viewer, however, is not the occasional treatment of the workers, but rather the emphasis on Lörinc and the class he represents. For the movie presents the aristocracy in the major key, the working class in the minor key. Admittedly, that contextual emphasis was there in the novel, but the studied elaboration of the refined aristocratic milieu is a new element in the film. Extraordinary attention is given to the details of life of the ruling class. Holidays in Dubrovnik, garden parties and soirées accompanied by Chopin, feature the Parcen-Nagy family in extravagant costume, amidst resplendent furnishings. That surfeit of riches goes beyond the demands of the narrative: it aims to dazzle the audience with its abundance, to offer a vision of luxury which is inconsistent with the mode of socialist life. Only in historical pieces can the director justify such fineries by appropriating them to the decaying ruling class. The result is a series of opulent vignettes which does not openly conflict with Party ideology, yet which satisfies the public's materialistic longings.

The Hungarian cinema's concern with visual riches goes beyond an indulgence in the luxuries of the past. It has affected the use of the camera and the very method of narrative construction. With the liberation from the concrete, non-abstract style of socialist realism, Hungarian directors have gone further than any of their Eastern European counterparts in developing films of visual and narrative complexity. The elaborate choreography of actors and camera in the films of Miklós Jancsó, Sándor Sára's sensual photography in Zoltán Huszárik's *Sindbad* and the collective flashbacks of the tenants of an apartment building to present a kaleidoscopic view of history in István Szabó's *25 Fireman Street* are examples of this tendency. In *The Unfinished Sentence* the most obvious feature is the departure from linear narration. The film is punctuated by labelled photographs of the principals taken years after the action of the story, revealing their fates to us long before the end of the film. Flashbacks and dream sequences further disrupt the flow of events.

While indications of past and future exist in the novel (Déry began writing the book in the year that he discovered Proust), their frequent use in the film effectively transforms it from the story of a family to a series of scenes of Hungary in the final years of its capitalist decadence. These interruptions of the narrative are highlighted by a display of technical virtuosity. The murder of the worker on a dark, empty street that occurs close to the start of the film is repeated

several times in the course of the movie; his body is seen falling at different speeds from different positions in different tones of colour. Lörinc dreams of being surrounded by his family as the camera takes his point of view to reveal their aggressively curious faces peering at him as they mechanically stir their coffee cups. Incapable of reconciling his background and his experiences in the factory, he is haunted by surrealistic dreams where characters from the two antagonistic worlds appear together. Bleached, spinning images of slow-motion dancing leap to the screen when his head hits the pavement in the final fight.

Consistent with the trend of experimentation in films since the abandonment of the doctrine of socialist realism, *The Unfinished Sentence* departs from previous standards mainly in an excessive preoccupation with form, and only secondarily in a change of content. Yet it is precisely in its treatment of politics that it can serve as a model for Western directors attempting to create a Marxist historical cinema. Throughout the film one is struck by the contrasts set up between workers and aristocrats. That contrast is borne out by the clothes they wear, the places they inhabit, their daily activities, down to their smallest mannerisms. Some of the most successful scenes and sequences, in both dramatic and political terms, are those in which the two are vividly juxtaposed. Thus, a strike takes place, with hundreds of workers massed in protest outside the Parcen-Nagy factory; in the foreground, on our side of the fence, standing in the dark with his back to us, is the solitary figure of Lörinc, passively observing the action. Or, scenes of elegant parties alternate with location shots of work going on at steel foundries. Such outright thematic and visual opposition carries within itself the dialectic which manifests itself in the class struggle.

Furthermore, the film provides a forceful example of characters who are typical, a quality Lukács ascribed to those whose 'innermost being is determined by objective forces at work in society.' Lukács had praised Déry for having 'fixed in his works important types and groups of types with their entangled social connections...'. Fábri successfully translates these characters to the film. What this means is that 'the determining factors of a particular historical phase are found in them in concentrated form' (Lukács). As a result, the characters exhibit different tendencies of social forces at work: the staunch remnant of the aristocratic order in Lörinc's grandmother, the flighty decadence of his sister, the political opportunism of his mother's lover, the undisciplined violence of the young lumpenprol. The social conflict is ultimately dramatised by the confrontation between Lörinc, exhibiting the weaknesses of the decaying ruling class, and Mrs. Rózsa, personifying the raw force of the proletariat. These characters simultaneously escape being mere schematisations of social forces, on the one hand, and asocial individuals, on the other. While the best of contemporary Western cinema depicts fully developed individuals, it often fails to place them within a social context and thus operates on a limited plane. In its flesh and blood characters with a social dimension, *The Unfinished Sentence* offers a vital model for Marxist cinema. ■

Television and Culture

In 1971, Stuart Hall submitted a four-part report to UNESCO entitled 'Innovation and Decline in the Treatment of Culture on British Television'. The final part of the report, which deals with television as a medium and its relation to culture, has recently been made available by the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies at the University of Birmingham. We are grateful to the Centre and Stuart Hall for permission to publish an edited version.

Above: 'Aquarius': Humphrey Burton calls on the Rt. Hon. Edward Heath, M.P.
Right: 'Civilisation': Lord Clark on Iona



Television is a *hybrid* medium. In part, this is because it is so extraordinarily heterogeneous in content and subject-matter. But, in terms of its formal properties, television also appropriates and cannibalises a variety of forms and techniques from other sources, including other media. Its position as a highly advanced and socially specialised technology is marked by the degree to which it *combines* old and new media into a new medium. As Enzensberger has remarked (in his article 'The Consciousness Industry'): 'All new forms of the medium are constantly forming new connections, both with each other and with older media ...'

In the domain of culture, broadly defined, a good deal of television appears to be a relatively untransformed reproduction of presentational forms typical of other arts and entertainments: the cinema, the theatre, the concert hall, the circus, the stage show, the music hall, the cabaret, the public lecture, the after-dinner conversation, the seminar, the interview, etc. I stress the point relatively untransformed. As Richard Dyer has remarked, 'pure, straight transmission in television is a utopian category.' Television *always* manipulates its raw material—it is, by nature, a 'dirty medium'. Though nature and actuality constantly appear before us on the screen as if transparently captured by the telecine, the images we see are constructions of or representations of 'the actual', not reality itself. This is the case even when television seems content simply to reproduce a theatre play on its original terms: the production has, in some way and to some degree, been rethought/reworked/realigned. The transparency of the television screen is an illusion.

The most significant test case here is, perhaps, the cinema film, which might appear the perfect example of 'straight transmission' on television. Yet this is not the case. There is always controversy about the degree, nature and extent of cuts imposed by television on films transmitted on the television screen. The cutting is mainly of two kinds: (a) to tailor films of uneven length to the rigid requirements of programme schedules, especially on ITV; (b) to remove 'unsuitable incidents', especially though not exclusively violent incidents, during the hours when children are watching. Further, the transmission on the small screen of an image intended for the big screen crucially alters its form and impact. Film on television is thus on several levels the product of small but significant transformations. Again, as Enzensberger reminds us, 'The most elementary processes in media production, from the choice of the medium itself to shooting, cutting, synchronisation, dubbing, right up to distribution, are all operations carried out on the raw material. There is no such thing as unmanipulated... filming or broadcasting.'

What makes television distinctive in this connection is (a) the relatively low level of the type of transformation which television operates on the great bulk of its contents; and (b) the very high proportion of cases in which the raw material is itself the content of another medium. A great range of transformations of material for television transmission consists of minor cuts in film, slight alterations of angle, lighting and composition of theatre plays for more compact television camera movements, rearranging the seating at public occasions so that they offer a more orchestrated 'studio audience' for the performance being filmed, rearranging the order or length of acts so as to suit the requirements of the camera or the schedules, etc. The instances where television fundamentally modifies its subject-matter are far fewer than we might suppose. Television uses up—indeed, exhausts—the contents of other media and of everyday life; but it does not

characteristically, decisively impose its forms upon that material. The weak character of its transformations is the source of what Dyer called 'the utopia of straight transmission'.

The question of forms seems inseparable here from contents. A fair proportion of television content is actuality—pictures of people, events and places in the 'real' world. A great deal of television material which is not live actuality is in the form of a report or documentary: that is, it tries to reproduce the forms of a 'live actuality'. Because television communicates in pictures, and is a rapid if not instant visualiser, a very high proportion of television is conceived in the naturalistic mode. When the illusion of formal transparency is linked with the weight of naturalistic content, we can understand why television's channel functions *appear* to predominate so widely over its medium functions.

The cinema, of course, is also a medium of visual realism, and the documentary film made for the cinema has many of the characteristics of a television programme—indeed, as a presentational form, the documentary is in general an ambiguous or intermediary zone between the two media. Many cinema documentaries are transferred straight from film to television, and vice versa. But characteristically, though the cinematic image has a fidelity or transparency to actuality, we have come more and more to think of the cinema as exploring, through its forms and language, the 'raw material' or actuality with which it deals. On the other hand, we tend to think of television as reproducing the reality with which it deals.

Thus, in the domain of culture and the arts, the audience probably values television as much, if not more, for its ability to give us the artistic experience direct, in its original form, as it does television's capacity to do something in its own terms with that experience. Via television, we can be *in* the theatre, Covent Garden, the Festival Hall, the Talk of the Town, Barnsley Working Men's Club, etc. This is television's relay function.

Television's power to 'capture reality' and transmit it into the living room is, then, its dominant function. In technical terms, this is often conceived as coincidental with television when it is transmitting 'live'—as opposed to using film or video-tape. But more careful consideration suggests that there is a complex and shifting relationship between the channel/medium continuum in television and the live versus film/taped distinction. Television might transmit the last night of the prom concerts while the occasion is in progress; the technical link, then, is direct between the 'outdoor' cameras and the transmitting/receiver apparatus. But it might *film* the last night of the proms 'as it happened', and transmit it later. In the first case, television is transmitting 'live'. In the second, it is transmitting filmed or stored images: the feel of actuality is an illusion. But both types of transmission still belong, essentially, to television's channel functions. In both cases, the presentational form is dictated largely by conditions in the concert hall: television only weakly imposes its own forms upon this already formed material.

The same is true, in reverse, when productions are mounted entirely in the television studio, and when the presentational forms and techniques have been worked out with television's requirements as the sole determinant. A studio play may be transmitted 'live' or it may be filmed/videotaped and transmitted later; but in formal terms, this is television operating as a *medium*: the script has been prepared, acting positions and movements worked out in relation to camera positions and angles, etc. In some cases, we have a complex interplay of all the elements. For example, a play with a strong documentary emphasis may be filmed on location, and transmitted at a later time. Its context and location then is very close to that of an 'actuality' transmission (this is indeed the illusion being sought in moving from studio to location). But it has been conceived formally in television terms, and probably edited, much as a film would be. Its mode of transmission is in the filmed/taped category, not in the 'live' category. In short, television's channel functions (where the imposition of television forms is weak) and its medium functions (where the imposition is stronger) make indiscriminate use of the technical means of transmitting material. The fact that much of television's 'canned' material creates the illusion of 'live actuality' is important; but this is an aesthetic and social matter—not a technical one. It has to do with television's innate naturalism, of form and content, and the developing body of practices and idioms in television, which tend strongly to favour and exploit that naturalism...

There does appear to be a continuum or spectrum here which impinges directly on the domain of culture. It seems to be a general rule that the more serious, 'high-brow' or 'high culture' in orientation the production is, the less it will be conceived *ex novo* for television, the more it will borrow forms from other media. The Shakespeare play will tend, on the whole, to be either a straight relay from the Stratford stage, or a production in studio which is subordinate in form, setting, acting technique, rhythm and staging to



Theatrical aside in Thames Television's production of the Restoration comedy 'The Confederacy of Wives'. Bernard Cribbins, Donald Sinden, Sheila Ballantine, Rosemary Leach

theatrical forms. The closer we get to the popular end of dramatic productions—popular plays, serials, series—the stronger will be the medium elements, the more distinct they will be from theatrical conventions...

A great range of programmes—sports coverage around the country on Saturdays, the attempt to integrate the various regional news magazine programmes into a single transmission (*Nationwide*), or the arts magazines like *Arena* or *Aquarius*—are sequences of filmed inserts presided over by a compère or presenter. The presenter in the studio 'builds a programme' for the viewer out of these filmed and video-transmitted items. An edition of *Grandstand*, for example, consists of (a) bits of 'live' video-transmission from the racetrack, rugby game, horse jumping competition, with the commentator on the spot providing a 'voice-over' commentary; plus (b) the tying together of these reports, 'in studio', by a resident compère, who administers the breaks between one event and another, smoothes the transitions from one place to

another, and, occasionally, makes use of studio aids, charts, diagrams, superimposed captions, etc., to 'give an overall sense' of the results or the state of the sporting world that afternoon.

Now the 'in studio' bits of that programme are formally strong in medium elements. No other medium, except perhaps radio, can 'create' a programme of this kind out of discrete fragments. The filmed or video-transmitted elements are weak in medium elements: the form of the race-meeting, the rugby game, etc., belongs intrinsically to sport, not to television. However, television has also transformed even these bits of actuality. It does not give us the whole rugby game, but edited highlights; it does not cover the whole field statistically, but moves cameras around, shifts angles and distances to *recreate* parts of the game for us in visual terms. So, in both aspects, the programme transforms its content. But the degree of transformation differs, as we move from the outdoor situation to the studio. Such a programme, which combines 'live studio' and filmed insert elements, is close to a television original. There is nothing

quite like it in any other medium.

This assembly role of television is one of its unique properties. The degree of technical co-ordination required to effect these switches from place to place, event to event, 'live' to 'canned' material, is enormous. So are the social, communicative—indeed, managerial—skills required to effect smooth narrative transitions between studio, reporters, events. The programme is an enormous feat of collective socio-technical co-ordination and control. But the effort to account for the programme as a whole in terms of a unified set of aesthetic criteria, or the attempt to derive such a coherent aesthetic from such programmes, is an extremely difficult, if not impossible, task. When the viewer is not totally absorbed into the 'raw material' of the programme, what he tends to notice most are aspects of this assembly and co-ordination process. He notices the mannerisms of the compère, his style or delivery, his encyclopaedic knowledge. He notices *especially* when things go wrong in the flow of production—loss of contact with a commentator at the other end of the line, unrehearsed pauses as we 'lose' and 'regain' sound, references to play in the rugby game unaccountably followed by an insert from a boxing championship. That is, he notices breaks in the smooth assembly and co-ordination-integration of the elements, because formally this is what the programme *is*. The aesthetics of the medium, then, tend to be fragmented or serialised. It is difficult to see what common formal terms can be applied, overall, to a programme which consists of good or poor coverage of the rugby game, good or bad link-commentary or illustration provided in the studio, and good or poor continuity maintained by presenter/producer between these elements.

The predominance of the assembly process as a characteristic of television communication has, of course, crucial consequences. It highlights the role and performance of the presenter or compère—to the degree that programmes become associated with the style, manner and personality of their presenters. These 'resident managers' imprint programmes with their personalities because the programmes themselves so centrally depend on the live execution of the skills of communication-management before the camera. But this, in turn, means that the vast bulk of television material is mediated to the audience through the techniques and personae of the presenters. Now this is of critical significance in the domain of culture, since what is important for this domain are the social values and attitudes invested in or overprinted on the cultural material itself.

Television can almost never be the means by which the viewer gains access to the 'raw materials' of culture, free of the mediation of cultural-social values inherent in the presentational elements of the programme. Thus *Monitor* derived its strengths and weaknesses not simply from the range of cultural things it offered to the viewer, but because of the socio-cultural package in which the 'raw material' was integrated. It was Wheldon-on-culture which *Monitor* offered us—and, through the presenter, a selective range of cultural attitudes were powerfully mobilised and transmitted. Because television so often consists of em-

'Grandstand': Alan Hart (editor) and Brian Venner (producer) with presenter Frank Bough





Huw Wheldon in 1960: '... it was Wheldon-on-culture which "Monitor" offered us'

bedding one kind of content-form within another, the very form in which the links and connections are forged becomes an intrinsic and powerful formulative element of the programme itself. Just as the camera guides, selects and omits as it ranges over its material, so the presenter or producer guides/selects/omits/stresses what has already been guided/selected, etc. The collective values and attitudes which structure and frame such processes of selection and assembly thus interpenetrate every content which television appears to 'present straight'. In short—whether to good ends or bad—television is technically and socially a thoroughly manipulated medium. The utopia of straight transmission, or the 'naturalistic fallacy' in television, is not only an illusion—it is a dangerous deception.

The whole argument hinges around one of television's technical properties which has not yet been clearly pinpointed. We speak of the 'television camera'; but we think of it as we think of a film camera. In the cinema the production/editing of the image and the distribution of the image are two distinct processes. We do not often take into account the fact that the television camera has a decisive dual function. When equipped with film stock, the 'television camera' functions like a film camera: it stores content on the film stock itself. When equipped with videotape, the camera can also store information and content for later transmission. But when, in studio, the 'camera' is linked directly to the transmitting apparatus, it stores nothing—it is a medium for passing the images directly into the channel and through to the receiver. In short, the television camera is itself a storing, an assembling and a transmitting device. The technical heart of the process is not the camera alone but the link-ups from cameras to transmitting apparatus...

Is there, then, no formal aesthetic which embraces the heterogeneous contents and occasions of television within a single coherent language? Are there a series of distinct, discrete television discourses, rather than a single discourse composed of different narrative elements? Our argument is the reverse of this proposition. Despite its massive heterogeneity, there does seem to us a single, coherent language of television to which all its different practices can be referred. This language is, for all practical purposes, indistinguishable from that of the cinema. Despite the many differences between the content, nature and social uses of television and the cinema, we believe that a formal aesthetic for the medium must and

can be elaborated. And we would base this elaboration on the phrase which the whore sings in Truffaut's *Shoot the Pianist*: 'La télévision, c'est un cinéma, où l'on peut aller en restant chez soi...'

Though television continually cannibalises and hybridises the content and presentational forms of other media and events/occasions, the universal set of practices by which this extremely heterogeneous raw material is transformed into television is a set which derives from the cinema. Thus, whether television is transmitting an interview in studio, a circus performance, a political rally, a demonstration, the results of a natural disaster or a chamber concert, the technical instrument by which it intervenes in these natural and cultural spaces is the camera; the basic link-up in television is the connection between cameras and the transmitting/receiver apparatus; the basic unit of all standard television discourse is the shot or sequence; and the rhetoric of all television discourse is a cinematic rhetoric—framing, distance, lighting, focus, filter, editing, mounting or assembling images together in sequence (montage), angle, etc. There are of course important differences in the balance between these rhetorical elements, and in the 'conditions of fabrication and of distribution' as between the cinema and television. But, as Christopher Williams has remarked, 'Perhaps quantitatively television drama will use more close-ups and close shots than the cinema would, but the language will stand or fall as an alternating dialectic expressed through close and long shots, just like the movies.'

Cinema has the advantage over much television in that its composition of individual frames can be more detailed and controlled; its discourse is consequently much tighter, more coherent. Television has the advantage over the cinema in that it can 'edit in' images and sequences from several different places into the single channel, or alternate 'live' sequences with filmed or videotaped inserts. Its discourse is consequently looser, more heterogeneous. But these distinctions, though important in certain respects, represent mainly variations on a set of standard modes of signification.

Where television does differ from film is in terms not of how it communicates, but of what, characteristically, it communicates. The great bulk of the content of film is, openly and recognisably, fiction. Because the camera possesses the power of such fidelity to nature, the majority of films work within a naturalistic/realistic set of conventions; but the material is clearly a fictional representation of the 'real'. Television, by contrast, constantly reproduces the events, actors, manners and interactions of everyday life—its subject matter is so frequently the subject matter of 'reality' that we are constantly tempted to believe that it has no intrinsic mode of signification at all, that it is a discourse without conventions.

The failure to recognise that television is, in every instant, a mode of communication, not 'real life'—a failure common to producers, critics, administrators and theorists alike—has prevented the articulation of a coherent social aesthetic for the medium. The whole apparatus of the medium appears to have been trapped within the illusion—

the 'utopia'—of 'straight transmission'. It has colluded with the fantasy that what we are seeing is a 'slice of life' and not a message about 'life'. In short, the symbolic mediation in television has been collapsed—with fatal consequences. The illusion that television transmits 'reality' in the raw leads us to pose the question—is life like that? The recognition that television transmits a symbolic representation of, a message about, reality leads us to pose a quite different question: namely, who says? Why does he see life like that?

The consequences of this displacement are manifold, and can only be briefly documented. Producers have become accustomed to think of their routine functions (apart from specially mounted productions) in terms of their ability to be 'faithful to reality'. They go to the scene of an event, and they try to give a faithful reflection of what is there. Yet, in fact, every programme about a real event or occasion is a re-invention, not a reflection, of reality. What they offer is an interpretation, in visual terms, of some raw slice of experience. A television programme, like a poem, is 'the adoption of various strategies for the encompassing of situations,' as Kenneth Burke once remarked. 'These strategies size up situations, name their structure and outstanding ingredients, and name them in a way that contains an attitude towards them.'

Administrators, too, have been absolved of their determining editorial responsibility, falling back on the prevailing excuse that their task is to open a 'window on the world'. Like the producers, much of their thinking about the medium is done within the limits of literary realism: the television programme is conceived as Stendhal conceived the novel, 'a mirror in the roadway'. When these common metaphors of reflection are extended to the domain of culture, they become something like the phrase used by Humphrey Burton to describe the arts review magazines—'magic casements'. And here we really are deeply enmeshed in the toils of the naturalistic fallacy. A 'magic casement' is, presumably, a sort of 'window on culture, on the realm of fancy and the imagination'. The most important, and neglected, aspect of the 'window'/casement metaphor is the question of the frames which windows impose upon scenes, the structures they make of what has been brought together, related together, within their viewpoint; most crucially, what is excluded by framing reality in precisely that way.

Theorists of the medium have not, on the whole, helped in any significant way to cut through these mystifying formulations about television. As the critic and analyst George Gerbner remarked, 'Television violence is not violence—it is the communication of violence.' Yet this aspect of television, which has been massively researched and theorised about, and which is a subject of widespread public anxiety, has been systematically dealt with on the basis of a one-to-one link, on a behavioural continuum, between television and the real world. This is not, of course, to absolve television of all effects. But it is to insist that, in this area as in all others, the behavioural link—television-to-nature—is, consistently, the wrong dimension along which to look for social effects;

the crucial link is the socially mediated one—television-to-culture. As Gerbner remarks, 'The symbolic functions of the communications are not necessarily the same as those of the behaviour they symbolise . . .'

Even when television seems most to open a 'window on the world', it selects what it sees; and it can only communicate what it selects by transforming behaviours into images—by translating the social into the symbolic. All such transformations must, by definition, be forms of accomplished work. There must be rules and conventions—that is, an aesthetic; and there must be techniques, codes, idioms and values—that is, a set of social practices.

Social Practices

The essential transformation of reality which television ceaselessly practises is achieved, we are suggesting, by way of a set of rules and conventions through which behaviour becomes symbolic action; and a set of social idioms and practices which form the basis of the professional techniques available to producers, directors and technicians, by which symbolic actions become communication. This is the immanent structure of television as a communicative praxis. It is embedded in socio-economic structures and institutions, and these in turn within political and ideological configurations which establish outer limits and determinations, but which bear back upon the screen and the image itself—its production, distribution and reception—through the internal practices.

The working knowledge about television, the ideas about what sort of medium it is, the theories about its use and the sum total of established conventions are sedimented as a form of socio-technical knowledge within the profession itself. They form part of the practical do's and don'ts which television producers pick up 'on the run', which they apply and refine in their working lives, and which they call upon and elaborate through their work on any particular programme. Such 'working knowledge'—professionalised, informally codified as a set of routines, transmitted from one generation of producers to another as the folklore of the industry—rarely if ever is forced back to first principles, or obliged to examine its theoretical and ideological presuppositions. The 'naturalistic illusion' has thus become deeply imprinted into the technical conventions of television production, and underpins many, if not all, of the significant techniques which are used in the making of programmes.

There is no space here to examine in detail what the existing set of codes and idioms are in British television: we can only offer a highly abbreviated characterisation. On the whole they seem to amount to recipes and tags which can be integrated within the notion of 'what constitutes good television'. Good television captures the on-going form of real life; it is close to actuality. Good television is smoothly edited, chaired and presented—it offers a polished professional product, largely in terms of the assembly of material, the smooth management of the transitions. It is 'good television' if there are no breaks or discontinuities. Despite recent innovations, it is still the case that, by and large, in 'good'

professional television, the technical nature of the medium is thoroughly suppressed: any reminders that there are cameras, cameramen, sound booms, interviewers, commentators, technicians, secretaries, script-girls, location or studio-managers, producers, directors, telecine recordists and so on, invisibly intervening as a collective production unit between 'reality' and the viewer, destroys the illusion of immediacy and transparency. Some of the more 'creative' programmes—especially in the comedy and discussion area—do make use of the television 'hardware' as part of the set; but standard television production, which aims at the polished professional product, still characteristically suppresses the technical component.

All television must be 'rapid'—it is not a medium which can be permitted to stray from its point, desert or digress from its original programme conceptions, turn up unexpected materials, etc. 'Good' television talk is brief, concise, makes one or two points only in a clear and simple manner. Television is not a medium for complexly structured or nuanced argument or exposition. 'Good' television conversation is well-bred, allows a balance of points of view, never disrupts the even tenor by shows of anger, deep commitment, flights of rhetoric, symbolic or metaphoric statement. 'Good' television is, essentially, majority television: that is, for an audience composed not—as it almost certainly is—of different groups, with cross-cutting minority interests, but as a large, undifferentiated homogeneous mass. Thus, 'good' television must be either plain, simple and straight, or it requires the mediation of the explainer/guide/moderator, who 'stands in' for the absent audience and makes the complicated plain, simple and straight.

There are, of course, two variants of this gospel: the demotic variant, which pretends that television is exactly real life, where 'the people' are, 'what the people want'; and the paternalistic variant, which pretends that the medium itself must continually translate complex realities into the simple terms which 'the man in the street' can comprehend. 'Good' television visualises whenever it can, never uses a word when it can supplant it with an image or an illustration, and is constantly beset by people who do not understand its visual mysteries and who insist that television should sound intelligent as well as look professional. Good television is visually dramatic, the pictures are full of incident. 'Bad' television is static, talking heads, long camera takes, pictures which do not 'move' . . .

Some of these idioms may well be the distilled wisdom of the profession. Many of them are pure fictions. Yet they enclose the practice of television production like an iron corset. Any producer who wishes to work outside the conventional limits has to struggle hard and ceaselessly against the tide of professional orthodoxy. This is constricting enough in the news/current affairs/documentary area; but it is punishingly limiting in the area of fiction, drama and the arts.

Around these conventional wisdoms there has accreted over time a hard shell of professionalism, to which most broadcasters are strongly committed, and which it is

difficult to break or dislodge. This is not helped by the speed at which television is obliged to work, the massive absorption of varied contents to which it is devoted, and the short life-span of the programme as a finished product. Here, the long term interests of the medium are contradicted by the way television work is organised. Programmes are 'used up' once and for all as commodities and then abandoned to the files or, more often, simply wiped. The 'actuality' myth actually works against the repetition of 'great' past programmes, and creates the illusion of the instantaneous: yesterday's programme, like yesterday's newspaper, is a discarded commodity from which no one can learn anything of much use. In any event, only the prestige programmes are retained for posterity, whereas producers would probably learn more from less prestigious productions; and there is no sustained, developing body of criticism or theory . . . As Tony Garnett, a producer who has spent much of his time struggling against the dominant conventions, has remarked, television producers are always talking, not about what it would be right to do, but rather about 'what sort of works' in television. What 'sort of works' in television is, really, television's accreted common sense, its conventional wisdom. And nine times out of ten, common sense is *wrong*.

There are institutional reasons too—ultimately political ones—why the deeply manipulative nature of television as a medium is subject to such widespread non-recognition. For both the BBC and ITV are massively constrained, within the limits of their charters, on the question of editorial freedom. Until recently, all programmes had to be balanced, in terms of point of view or interest, within the individual programme. It is now commonly accepted that they need to be balanced only within a reasonable space of time. But whenever the subject matter of a programme is political, controversial or likely to arouse strong feeling, television becomes vulnerable to political, institutional and interest group pressure; and to defend itself against or pre-empt such attacks, it will tend to try to balance out the extremes in terms of the people it invites to participate. Editorial balance and objectivity is then reinforced by the 'neutral' role of the studio presenter/interviewer, who compounds his role as technical manager or administrator of presentation with his role as the socio-political manager of opinions and attitudes. Even in areas which are not overtly political—the domain of culture and the arts—television rarely expresses an overt view: the presenter is, again, a ubiquitous figure.

In this way, television meets the public requirement that it should not have opinions of its own, that it should not editorialise; while concealing the fact that, since it *must* constantly select material, edit, mount in sequence, omit, emphasise, link and associate, it cannot help but editorialise. And each single act of selection is saturated by social values and attitudes. Television has suppressed *this* level of 'editorialising' by setting up a false opposition between overt content and attitudes and the technical/professional aspect of television production. The first, it is suggested, falls within the domain of politics and opinion, or at best of

programme policy, and the professional broadcasters must avoid it; the second falls within the domain of the medium's technical requirements, and here television can operate objectively. This apologia is then underpinned by the 'utopia' that, for much of the time anyway, television does not select or reproduce at all: it simply shows what is already there.

The American documentary film-maker Frederick Wiseman has put the point succinctly in an interview with *Cinema* magazine. His observations could be applied, *tout court*, to television. 'The editorial decisions are going on all the time: what to shoot, what not to shoot, how to shoot it... I'm constantly thinking about what it is I'm getting, what it's saying, and what I want to say out of the material. That goes on in a much more intensive way in the editing room. It becomes a more rational process... Each film represents a theory... towards the material, and the theory is the structure of the film.'

If television does not as yet have a social aesthetic, it is not because the medium possesses no intrinsic form, but because its powers to transform content, and its existing weak and strong transformations, have been subjected to a sort of collective repression. Television's formal underdevelopment is the outcome of this socially located phenomenon.

Politics of the Medium

In his remarkable essay, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction', Walter Benjamin remarked on the absolute uniqueness of the camera. 'The camera need not respect the performance (or the event) as an integral whole. Guided by the cameraman, the camera continually changes position with respect to the performance. The sequence of positional views which the editor composes from the material supplied him constitutes the completed film. Hence the performance... is subject to a series of optical tests.' The naturalist painter, Benjamin observed, 'maintains in his work a natural distance from reality, the cameraman penetrates deeply into its web.'

The camera, whether on location or in studio, does not reproduce the form of an event or production as a whole, it penetrates into that seeming totality, it dissects reality, breaking it down into the composed reality which is the product of the dialectic of shots, angles, edited sequences, etc. Its 'illusionary nature' is thus the product of the fact that 'the mechanical equipment has penetrated so deeply into reality that its pure aspect, freed from the foreign substance of equipment, is the result of a special procedure, namely, the shooting by a specially adjusted camera and the mounting of shots together with similar ones. The equipment free aspect of reality here has become an orchid in the land of technology.'

There is no space to develop in detail what the consequences are for the aesthetics of television communication. What is certain is that use of the camera enables the medium to explore reality—a potential which is not always realised. Thus, for example, the way a football game is photographed for television contains, embedded in its rhetoric, a theory about the game, as well as pictures of the game. We could



The authenticity of television: a scene from Granada's 'A Family at War'

derive from the so-called formal analysis of such a transmission the commonsense ideas about what is and what isn't exciting in sport, what does and doesn't constitute a 'significant play', how good and bad moves are anticipated in the shift from one monitor to another, at which points the producer believes a detail will be significant, at which points he believes the whole shape of the play and the disposition of the field matters most. Each shot also contains assumptions about the spectator—what he is assumed to find exciting, what dull; how he is likely to 'read' the game as presented; perhaps about the role of sport in the structure of leisure itself.

Similarly, the way a camera is used to explore a painting or piece of sculpture has imprinted into its movements and sequences a 'theory about' painting, and a theory about what the audience will find important about painting. If we know how to read the rhetoric of images, we ought to be able to tell, from the way the material of culture is handled visually in *Civilisation*, what sort of script Sir Kenneth Clark *would have* to write for that film, and what view of culture made him choose to take *those* objects filmed in *that* way. When filming in the studio, the producer has greater control over his material, and he can predispose it for the fluid transcription into images and sequences. 'On location', the director must edit and compose as he goes, and, while appearing to follow the natural 'line' of an event or action, must constantly translate this into a different logic—the logic of presentation, exposition and reception, including the ability of the finished product to be 'read' in a certain way by an audience. The producer may or may not be consciously aware of this massive and persistent manipulation of reality, and much of the practice of television production and criticism is clearly based on a sort of collective 'forgetfulness'.

Original forms: 'Monty Python's Flying Circus'. Eric Idle, John Cleese



But this does not mean that no manipulation is taking place. It simply means that, for much of the time, television operates with what can only be called an unconscious aesthetic based on a veiled social practice.

Benjamin argues that the development of forms of mechanical reproduction profoundly transforms both the status of the work of art itself, and the relationships of viewers and audiences to what they see. 'The uniqueness of a work of art,' he suggests, 'is inseparable from its being embedded in the fabric of tradition.' Our attitude towards its uniqueness, its un-reproducibility, weaves what he calls an 'aura' about it, with a basis in ritual. But with the growth of means of communication which are fundamentally manipulative—that is, which, by their nature, continually break up and rearrange totalities so that they cease to be 'whole in themselves', and which assert the endless reproducibility of the work in new forms—that 'aura' is destroyed forever: there is a tremendous 'shattering of tradition'. And artistic production comes to be based not on ritual but 'on another practice—politics'.

For the same reasons, the mechanical means of reproducing reality profoundly alter the traditional attitude of the audience to what it sees. The unique object becomes the object of infinite reproducibility. The tradition in which the object is embedded becomes a plurality of traditions, offering different ways in which the object may be appropriated, both by the camera and by the audience. The notion of an audience frozen in a single attitude or stance towards art is transformed by the continual re-appropriation of the work within *different* attitudes and stances; thus its 'aura' of distance, intangibility, and the appropriate attitudes of reverence and silent acknowledgment, are de-totalised. With respect, then, either to art or events in the real world, the coming of the camera, and its use as a means of everyday communication, greatly enlarges the audience's 'sphere of action'.

As Benjamin remarks: 'By focusing on hidden details of familiar objects, by exploring commonplace milieus under the ingenious guidance of the camera, the film on the one hand extends our comprehension of the necessities which rule our lives; on the other hand, it manages to assure us of an immense and unexpected field of action. Our taverns and our metropolitan streets, our offices and furnished rooms, our railroad stations and our factories appeared to have us locked up hopelessly. Then came the film and burst this prison-world asunder by the dynamite of a tenth of a second, so that now, in the midst of its far-flung ruins and debris, we calmly and adventurously go travelling... Evidently a different nature opens itself to the camera than opens to the naked eye—if only because an unconsciously penetrated space is substituted with the resources of its lowerings and liftings, its interruptions and isolations, its extensions and accelerations, its enlargements and reductions. The camera introduces us to *unconscious optics* (my italics) as does psychoanalysis to unconscious impulses.'

The everyday milieus of social life become, for the first time in a mass medium, the scenarios of action: ordinary people become, in their reproduced image (and still, of course, contained within and by a

rhetoric of domination and expropriation), the actors in a 'play' which is everyday life. Television itself, of course, continues to be governed by ideologies and social practices dictated by the social exclusiveness of its 'means' and 'content'; it continues to reproduce the model of small groups of communicators—the arbiters of taste, the judges of action, the guardians of tradition—speaking to the excluded, atomised, serialised, 'anonymous' audience. But here the forms of domination are deeply contradicted by the images of a transformed world, which tradition and exclusiveness can no longer pacify and appropriate, and which break through the 'aura' in every hour of broadcasting.

Television holds an ambiguous position between what is traditionally defined as 'art' and what is commonly understood as 'communication'. But this is not a simple confusion. Within the prevailing wisdom, it is seen as a medium which continually lowers 'art' into the contours and images of everyday life. But it could equally well be understood as a medium which, by revolutionising the boundaries between these two hitherto exclusive domains, perpetually raises everyday life into a sort of artistic communication—which continuously transforms the 'real world' into a powerful image of itself.

For these reasons, television is least comfortable, and seems least to exploit its intrinsic qualities, when it inhabits—with the traditional attitudes—the domain of 'high art' itself. This relationship—between the traditional culture and the medium—seems increasingly an inadequate way of trying to conceptualise the relationship of the medium to culture itself. It is in relation to television that we seem most to require new ways of defining the categories of everyday life, 'art', entertainment. It is not therefore surprising that, in drama, it is the blurring of this fine distinction—the overlap between fiction and documentary—which has proved most revolutionary. And the documentary or everyday elements of life, integrated into a fictional form of representation, on the one hand account for some parts of the spectrum of television production which we still think of as 'art' (for example, 'documentary' plays as against the Shakespeare production); but also overlap with domains which are only ambivalently, if at all, appropriate to 'art'.

The quality of the serials, the popular dramas, the thriller stories and the situation comedies is of course extremely variable. But when they are done with care, originality or conviction, they seem to inhabit a world natural to television in ways which the routine handling of traditional 'high art' material does not. If we think about the medium, rather than about art as traditionally defined, we would be obliged to list, as variable points of reference from which a truly television art could be elaborated, not *Aquarius* or *Monitor* but *Steptoe and Son*, *Till Death Do Us Part*, *Coronation Street*, the early *Z-Cars*, *Family at War*, *Monty Python's Flying Circus*, the early *Rowan and Martin Laugh-In*, and so on. And—whatever is the individual critic's list—these programmes seem to contain elements of what is a truly authentic television language because they exploit its

potential outside the traditional aura of 'art', which, increasingly, comes across as a domain of exclusive privilege and taste, appropriated into a social mode and invested with ritual values altogether at odds with television's indigenous open style.

Popular drama, the serials and so on, are of course—given the present structure of television—mercilessly subject to routinisation, to formula work, shot through with the 'false demotic', and so on. What is intended here is not a defence of these kinds of television works as against 'art' television, but an effort, by way of such examples, to wrest from its present uses some image of the medium's true potential. And what, at the very least, it seems possible to claim is that an authentic development of television as a medium will rest on a full recognition of the degree to which it has *already*—in fragmented and unsuccessful ways—revolutionised the basic triadic relationship between communicator-message-audience.

It may be possible, from such a position, to reappropriate the traditional content of 'art' and culture—but this, too, like everything else in television, will have to begin by recognising that the ritual relationship between 'art' and audience has been destroyed, and that the transformation and reproduction of the content of 'art' is utterly different when the instrument of reproduction is the camera, and the recipient is the great mass of the viewing public. What is so striking, then, about the existing uses of television in the domain of art and culture is its rooted anachronism: its playing over again of old tunes, its attempt to restore modes of deference, of dutiful attention, in a period and a medium which is beginning, in however contradictory a manner, to transcend them.

Television is still, of course, a medium in which characteristically the few address the many. At present, the only 'feedback' which really counts is the feedback of audience figures—that which assures the broadcaster of his dominant minority position in a majority medium, and which reinforces the exclusivity of discourse. Yet what is potential in the very language and form of the medium is a different, and alternative, set of relationships: in which, through the mutual exploration of reality, new, transformed realities begin to be jointly created. Nowhere is it so clearly the case as in the domain of art and culture that television is, at present, a powerful mobilising mass medium of a special and specially democratic kind, which is currently defined and used in sophisticated elitist ways. The images of an unintelligent audience, a homogeneous mass of anonymous viewers, linked to the medium only by their common ignorance, which sustain so much television production, and of the privileged professional minority in its midst, are ideological fictions of a powerful sort which now constitute the major breaks and constraints on the development, in television, of its intrinsic social and political qualities.

Television invites us, not to serve up the traditional dishes of culture 'more effectively', but to make real the utopian slogan which appeared in May 1968, adorning the walls of the Sorbonne. 'Art is dead. Let us create everyday life.'

Fassbinder on Chabrol

from page 206

that he just did decent bread and butter work in this period. Over a period of four years there were five films, and two planned sequels. We know what he made—and he knows, too, what he might have made; each genre is so interwoven that one can finally make everything look like its opposite. One has only to consider the obligatory Hollywood happy endings, and one knows one could do the same. Chabrol opted for the easier affirmative path and, I say again, I believe he knew very well what he was up to.

Le Scandale, although made before *La Route de Corinthe*, led him into the fourth period of creativity which is generally associated with the name of Chabrol. One could say, as a generalisation, that from now on Chabrol aims to knock bourgeois values. The question is: is he knocking them in order to overcome them or to maintain them? I think the latter is more likely. Agreed, Chabrol is somewhat saddened that things are no longer so clear and orderly; sad that mankind is so bad. It is still not the conditions and the system which makes people the way they are that interests Chabrol but the result—as long as it is picturesque enough. And that is really inhuman.

Chabrol's films in this latest period are inhuman because they are fatalistic, cynical and contemptuous of mankind. Exceptions prove the rule. Remarkably, in contrast to the earlier periods, it is the stories of *Les Biches* and *La Rupture* which, being non-realistically proposed from the outset, one can tolerate. And *Le Boucher* is a great film, in which Chabrol consistently, and for the first time, develops a story dealing with real people. Alas, the only time. The only film where he doesn't pummel the audience into accepting senseless proceedings as inevitable. Otherwise, he knocks the public over the head and does so with such perfect form that one can hardly resist. That's why it's so dangerous. In itself, this universe seems all right. But it has nothing to do with the lives of those who pay for films at the box-office; it makes no connection with them, apart from *Les Biches* and *La Rupture*.

Both these films, remote though they are, are still to some extent accessible, and it doesn't matter that there are no people there, only shadows. Shadows with an elusive glamour whose tale will be well told. Chabrol controls his narrative art to perfection—even though the films become ever more slovenly in their form. Occasionally one gets the impression that Chabrol must have invented the zoom shot, that saddest of all the cinema's devices. One or two fantastically beautiful travelling shots, otherwise dull, smooth images with no particular concern for lighting or colour. And two downright bad films: *Dr. Popaul* and *Nada*. Here we have complete fascism. Quite clearly. But it was always lurking there and had to come out one day.

Chabrol's scorn for his audience becomes clear from his four television films. One can't do such unthinking work when it is destined for such a big audience. Instead of approaching television as a challenge which could enlarge the film-maker's vision, he treats it as merely burdensome. But that, too, has its logic.

Film Reviews

The Tenant

Behind the credits, a face peering out through a window; a downward pan revealing a vertiginous drop to the courtyard below; a pan back to the window and round the court to another face, a girl's, which quickly turns into Roman Polanski's; a continuing movement past a chimney, across more windows—down one side of the building, over a railing and up another side—eventually coming round to the door leading to the street, which Polanski enters... If the remainder of *The Tenant* (CIC) were as impressive as the first shot, we conceivably might have had a masterpiece on our hands. Nearly as concise as the extended crane shot opening *Touch of Evil*, it differs from the latter by arranging its arsenal of elements into a 'non-narrative' pattern—a set of materials which, except for the girl turning into Polanski, are related spatially but not chronologically, until Polanski's entrance through the street door launches the story proper.

A naturalised Pole named Trelkovsky is interested in seeing a flat, and the unfriendly concierge (Shelley Winters) gives him a hard time about it, agreeing to take him upstairs only after he slips her some money. Showing him the rather stale two rooms and remarking that the toilet is down the hallway, she also notes, 'The previous tenant threw herself out of the window' and falls into jolly laughter, adding 'She's not dead yet' but instantly reassuring him that she won't recover. Before long, he is negotiating with the morose Mr. Zy (Melvyn Douglas), who warns him that it's a quiet building and he won't tolerate the tenant entertaining young ladies in his room.

A bitterly precise portrayal of the sort of ungenerous xenophobia a non-French tenant is likely to encounter in Paris, such attitudes are only forecasts of what Trelkovsky has to face once he moves in. Although the film's French version confronts us with a dubbed Winters and Douglas—in contrast with a dubbed Isabelle Adjani in this version—it also makes the anti-French strain a lot more explicit. Beneath this is an expression of humane anguish, poignantly underlined by Polanski's subtle performance, about the conditions imposed by city living, where the mere existence of a neighbour can be an imposition and a suicide can wind up functioning as a means of providing someone else with living space. The implication, duly borne out by the film itself, is that such a situation could drive anyone mad. But beneath this notion in turn are the formal operations through which Polanski develops it—providing an insight into both the strengths and limitations of his work.

Ever since *Knife in the Water*, his career has largely gravitated round the problem of reconciling certain formal interests with the more 'saleable' sides of his artistic persona (principally black humour and a taste for Grand Guignol). It is significant that *What?*, the film where his formal concerns are probably most evident, might well be the least critically and commercially successful of his efforts to date; if satire, according to George S. Kaufman, is what closes in New Haven, formalism in 'mainstream' cinema can't even hope for an East Orange pre-

view unless it sneaks in under another label, usually stylistic or thematic. In the case of Polanski, this taboo seems to have brought about a kind of schizophrenia no less troubling than some of his disordered characters—a sense of cross-purposes that finally splits *The Tenant* into virtually dissociated sections.

Film No. 1, roughly the first half, exhibits Polanski's formalist side, above all in its accumulation of *partis pris* and its ambiguous treatment of 'objective' facts and subjective states of mind. As in *What?*, many of these factors can be located in the soundtrack. The water dripping from Trelkovsky's kitchen tap, the rattle of pipes, the squeak of his cupboard door, the repetitive piano exercises heard from the stairway, the faint cooing of pigeons in the courtyard and the angry pounding of the neighbour upstairs all outline the space of a constricted consciousness; while the latter—always provoked by the sounds made in Trelkovsky's flat—draws particular attention to this register of awareness. And when Trelkovsky turns from cooking to answer an apparent knock at the door—only to find no one there—one may well wonder whether or not one *did* hear a knock: the sensitivity to sound developed in the spectator combines with ambiguity to become an acute form of aggression. The bizarre blood-curdling scream of Simone, the former tenant—bandaged from head to toe when Trelkovsky visits her in the hospital, where he meets her friend Stella (Isabelle Adjani)—is significantly accompanied by a zoom to her mouth. And on the verbal level of sound, who is to say when or how (or even if) the priest's sermon at Simone's funeral becomes the hero's own projection when the subject turns to the putrefaction of

corpses? Comparable uncertainties are created in visual terms: is the blonde girl Trelkovsky glimpses at the funeral the crippled daughter of his persecuted neighbour Mme. Gaderian (Lila Kedrova), whom we see later? Is her later appearance also an illusion—which is suggested when Mme. Dioz (Jo Van Fleet), her mother's persecutor, flatly states that Mme. Gaderian has a son, not a daughter? At what stage do the strange appearances of figures standing in the toilet across from Trelkovsky's window stop being mysteries and start becoming hallucinations?

If Film No. 1 is largely devoted to posing such questions in the form of brilliant notations, Film No. 2—by establishing that the hero has gone mad—laboriously proceeds to answer others. A cut from Trelkovsky grasping his own throat to Mme. Dioz attempting to strangle him clearly labels the second shot as a hallucination; and countless other juxtapositions between real and imagined torments lead one straight into the clinical context of *Repulsion*. To put it as crudely as the film does, this is the kind of violence that audiences pay to see, with 'reality' and 'imagination' slotted into separate compartments so that one can watch the hero's agony from a safe voyeuristic distance. There is, to be sure, a moralistic point implied in much of this: the 'unexplained' ransacking of Trelkovsky's flat is later echoed by his own ransacking of Stella's flat in a paranoid rage, suggesting that victims eventually take on the behaviour of their persecutors. And when, for instance, Trelkovsky flees to a hotel and gazes out of a window, where he and we see two workmen who *might* be looking up at him, the earlier terms of the film are briefly allowed to reverberate. But by this time it is too late: after Trelkovsky has gradually gone through the process of becoming Simone—even dressing up as a woman, and eventually jumping twice in succession from the same window—the see-sawing movement between 'truth' and 'illusion' has become too mechanical for either to carry much conviction. And when Polanski ends with a paraphrase of the previous hospital scene—Trelkovsky (apparently) encased like a mummy in bandages, looking up at Trelkovsky and Stella, then screaming while the camera zooms towards his mouth—formal interest has shrunk to the level of stylistic pirouette, and ambiguity becomes just the other side of apathy.

JONATHAN ROSENBAUM

Roman Polanski in 'The Tenant'



Buffalo Bill and the Indians

In the preface to his play *Indians*, on which Altman's *Buffalo Bill and the Indians* (EMI) is loosely based, Arthur Kopit notes how, during rewritings between the London and Broadway openings, he evolved from John Ford parody towards nightmare: 'This, again, was what I had always wanted. To create an impression. Not something didactic, but something musically amorphous, and viscerally disturbing, like a bad dream—to be thought about, after it's all over. Pieced together again, like a puzzle.'

Curiously, this serves better as a description of Altman's film than of the play, partly because Kopit never quite surmounted the problem of how to make the nightmare not only Buffalo Bill's (as he is gradually forced to face the extent to which he has allowed truth to be papered over by myth) but the audience's. By using as the still centre of Buffalo Bill's mental storm a reconstruction of the U.S. Commission's visit to Standing Rock in 1886—a parley which resulted directly in the take-over of the Great Sioux Reservation for the benefit of white settlers, and indirectly in the assassination of Sitting Bull and the massacre at Wounded Knee four years later—Kopit in fact reduces nightmare to all-too-understandable logic. 'Ya see,' says Buffalo Bill in an effort to expound the Indians' apparently surrealistic logic to the Senators, 'the Indian believes the earth is sacred and sees ploughin' as a sacrilegious act.' Revealing the red man's ingrained philosophical and territorial beliefs, and matching them against the white's expansionist needs, these scenes simply demonstrate how, in the circumstances, the twain could never hope to meet.

Altman tackles the problem rather differently, by deliberately decentralising any question of the reality of the Indian. As the camera pulls back at the beginning of the film to reveal that the ferocious redskin attack on a pioneer shack is merely a rehearsal for one of the Wild West Show's acts, a wounded Indian extra trampled by a horse is hurried away. Subsequently, as the film bustles into the characteristic Altman flurry of sidelong jokes and overlapping dialogue while the Wild West Show marshals its characters and resources, an enigmatic shot of Indians silhouetted against the forest is laconically explained as the funeral of the dead extra before it is swallowed up by the kaleidoscopic action, leaving no ripple behind. A single Ford set-up of a pioneer burial carries an automatic charge;

but *this*, the film implies, is alien to our culture, our understanding, our emotions.

From this point on, *Buffalo Bill and the Indians* becomes a confrontation of myth with myth. And exactly as the reception committee waiting to welcome the new guest star to Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show is deceived into ignoring the meekly undersized Sitting Bull (Frank Kaquitts) in favour of his gigantic interpreter William Halsey (Will Sampson), so the audience is lured into accepting the image it expects. Massive, impassive, and every inch the fearsome Geronimo of imagination, Halsey (a fictional character replacing the John Grass of history and Kopit's play) takes the part of the proud, noble savage currently worshipped. Authorised to speak throughout for the world-weary Sitting Bull, he logic-chops the opposition to ribbons at every turn, whether provoking Buffalo Bill (Paul Newman) into displays of arrogant white superiority or picking historical holes in the hilariously inept scenario for the Little Big Horn playlet. Halsey's persona as the image created by white guilt is given a savage twist when, after Sitting Bull's death, he is seen committing the final betrayal of impersonating his Chief in the gladiatorial combat in which Buffalo Bill contemptuously vanquishes his enemy.

Sitting Bull himself, meanwhile, is presented as an amusing primitive uninterested by the great debates going on around him, instead taking a simple-minded interest in the workings of a music-box or a senile delight in demonstrating that Buffalo Bill uses buckshot to facilitate his sharpshooting act. In fact, however, what his behaviour displays is simply a common, unheroic humanity. 'He wanted to show the truth to the people for once,' cries Annie Oakley (Geraldine Chaplin), threatening to resign because Buffalo Bill refuses to change his Little Big Horn scenario to show that the massacre was provoked by an attack ordered by Custer on squaws and children in the Indian camp. But it is Halsey who proposes this rewrite in Sitting Bull's name, to the accompaniment of a spine-chilling chant, while Sitting Bull pursues the business of living with calm, unquenchable curiosity. A point undemonstratively echoed by the distant mountains, first seen in the film's opening image as the camera pans down from them to the American flag raised over the Wild West Show's stockade, and thereafter omnipresent as a sort of Shangri La beyond the land across the river to which

Sitting Bull retreats with his people to escape the confines of the Wild West Show. By a happy coincidence (or perhaps calculation), since the film was shot on an Indian reservation in Alberta, these mountains are the ones Sitting Bull must have seen when, in 1877, less interested in continuing to fight or set records straight than in being left in peace to hunt buffalo, he led his people into Canada, only to return four years later for imprisonment, exile and death because neither the Great White Father nor the Great Mother who ruled Canada could see his point of view.

So while the two myths confront each other in the centre of the film's arena, finally achieving the resolution obligatory today in the (deliberately unconvincing) scene where Buffalo Bill is haunted by the ghost of the Indian he betrayed, another nightmare is quietly adumbrated in the more genuinely haunting mysteries never explained by the film, and which gradually knit together to form a subtext in which the Indian acquires a strange magical-religious property: the mysterious river-crossing no one ever sees performed but which leaves Sitting Bull as high and dry as Christ walking on the waters; the moment when Sitting Bull and six followers vanish into the mountains, afterwards smilingly telling Buffalo Bill's baffled posse only that it was 'the first moon of the month'; the sudden zoom in to Sitting Bull's funeral pyre to reveal, among the bones, ashes and beads, what looks uncommonly like a Christian cross; and above all, the enigmatic theatricality of Sitting Bull's appearance in the Wild West Show when he first stuns the audience by levelling his gun at President Cleveland, then manoeuvres his horse into the dance promised as the climax to his act.

In an election year, and with its echoes of *Nashville*, the levelled gun has obvious connotations, fulfilling the expectations of a counter-culture nourished on the Wounded Knee demonstration and the welter of literature about Indian genocide currently flooding the bookshops. But what of that mysterious dance by the horse, mockingly accompanied by a Mozart minuet as the circus music fades away and President Cleveland mulishly refuses to accept the meeting foretold in Sitting Bull's dream?

According to Indian belief at the time, the old grey which was said to have embarked alone upon its repertoire of tricks after Sitting Bull was shot dead, was in fact performing the Dance of the Ghosts. As much as anything, it was this Ghost Dance religion, newly disseminated by the Paiute Messiah, which led to the extermination of the Sioux at Wounded Knee: partly because the white men feared that the secret ceremonies of the Ghost Dance would unite the Indian tribes (Sitting Bull's disappearance in the mountains) and because it blasphemed in taking over Christ from Christianity (the cross among the ashes); and partly because the Indians believed that no further struggle was necessary. 'In the next springtime, when the grass was knee high, the earth would be covered with new soil which would bury all the white men, and new land would be covered with sweet grass and running water and trees... The Indians who danced the Ghost Dance would be taken up in the air and suspended there while a wave of new earth was passing, and then they would be set down among the ghosts of their ancestors on the new earth, where only Indians would live.' (Dee Brown, *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee*).

'History is no more than disrespect for the dead,' says white surrogate William Halsey, interpreting a Sitting Bull plea for a reversal of historical guilts and responsibilities which even Buffalo Bill notices that Sitting Bull never actually uttered. Sitting Bull's History Lesson is an altogether more nightmarish threat: no less than obliteration of the white man's civilisation, traditions, and even existence.

TOM MILNE

'Buffalo Bill and the Indians': Paul Newman



Bugsy Malone

With impressive box-office figures already to its credit, it seems unlikely that anyone could be unaware that *Bugsy Malone* (Fox-Rank) is a musical gangster story set in 1929 New York, made at Pinewood, and performed entirely by kids. The film was directed by Alan Parker, who wrote the classroom love story *Melody*, has directed two television productions (one of them *The Evacuees*) and created innumerable commercials. His script for *Bugsy* derives its fun from the well-worn clichés of the gangster film—it's a kind of Saturday matinée *Godfather*, in which good-hearted layabout Bugsy (Scott Baio) and his singing sweetheart Blousey (Florence Dugger) search for fame and fortune in a tough city haunted by the Depression, parched by Prohibition and torn by gang warfare between rival bosses Fat Sam and Dandy Dan.

Punctuated by the usual spinning headlines and glimpses of outmanoeuvred cops (so abbreviated that a subplot seems to have gone missing in this area), the bouts between gangsters take place in familiar areas of assault—the barber's shop, the Chinese laundry, the speakeasy. But the limousines that glide through the wet streets are powered with bicycle pedals, and the blunt snouts of the machine-guns fling out marshmallow missiles, exploding on impact like custard pies. Victims are 'splurged', their faces frozen at the moment of impact in classic cartoon discomfort, their fate not so much oblivion as disqualification. At the end, the entire cast is swept into a giant pie-fight, *Battle of the Century* revisited, a bedlam from which they emerge identically splurged, all rivalries forgotten, a fairy-tale reincarnation that breaks the film's own rules. Not for these, the gutter deaths of Cagney and Robinson. 'You give a little love,' they sing, 'and it all comes back to you.'

With no stars, no precedent, and only the NFFC to support it, *Bugsy* had to fight for its life in a production climate disinclined to take risks, scarcely able to afford certainties. It deserves to do well, both for being made at all, and for being made with British talent more accustomed to gloom than to glory. It calls for praise not because it indicates any path to renaissance (given that *Bugsy's* main asset is novelty, it's difficult to imagine any tolerable sequel), but because it was created with enthusiasm, humour and charm. So long as one stays with its bright, perky surface, the film is an uncomplicated pleasure.

The baggy suits and feathery dresses of the 1920s have been lovingly recreated in miniature, and the seedy vulgarity of the décor would have put Raft or Muni at ease. Even the signs of haste and economy, the small, sparse sets, are in keeping with the shabby backgrounds of countless screen Capones, while the superb custom-built cars, bursting through garage doors or charging headlong across country roads, are a touch of genius. In its curious artificiality, *Bugsy* has a delightful authenticity. Few members of his young cast having acted before, Parker constructs and protects their performances through a remarkable editing pace. He has a nice instinct for expressions and faces; the first musical number, for example, with its exuberant long-legged chorus line, is a resounding success not only thanks to the dancers and music (all sleazy brass and clattering piano) but also to the kaleidoscope of seemingly arbitrary shots of the audience, mostly under the age of twelve, sipping cautious drinks and gazing at the show in distant speculation. This staccato style is at its best when justified by the rhythm of the music, as in the 'So You Wanna Be a Boxer' number, where the rituals of training are incorporated as part of the choreography. In the dialogue scenes, it appears more contrived: Bugsy and Blousey, neither of them particularly adept at punching a wisecrack, tend to communicate in disconcertingly brief close-ups.

More generally, Parker observes the detail of the gangster genre with affectionate accuracy.



'Bugsy Malone': Fat Sam's gang

The opening moment of pursuit—lone fugitive stumbling into an alley as the shadows of his hunters lengthen across the cobbles—is an obvious sequence of homage, but the *Bonnie and Clyde* soft-focus of the summer afternoon get-away by the young couple is equally faithful to its source. And if the satire starts somewhat broadly, with much falling over buckets and squirting of soda-syphons, the film quickly settles to subtler observations.

If fault is to be found with *Bugsy*, there are two main aspects of uncertainty. Most crucial is the music by Paul Williams, recorded with a sophistication too often at odds with the performers miming to it. The unexpected solo given to Fizzy (the broom-boy), for example, could be an instant standard in any soul-singer's repertoire; but the voice, delivery and tone seem inappropriate for the diminutive figure on the screen, and the song appears ultimately irrelevant in that he remains outside the main story of the film. It's a cabaret item, nothing more. And *Bugsy's* other problem is also one of incongruity, in that Parker's characters are acting out Parker's allegiances rather than their own—the gangster film is hardly a part of *their* experience, and its passions, violence and vehemence are qualities they seem unlikely to be able to share. Thus the relationship between Bugsy and Blousey is an uneasy, almost chilly avoidance of its real meaning. Not that an audience of children is liable to waste concern over such things. And for restive adults, there's always Tallulah, who knows *exactly* what's going on; played by Jodie Foster, already a veteran at thirteen, she brings a snake-like hunger to the film that suggests she and Ma Barker would have got along fine.

PHILIP STRICK

Stay Hungry

In Bob Rafelson's first film, *Head*, Victor Mature played a genial *deus ex machina* manipulating the Monkees with Olympian disdain, demonstrating their insignificance by having them reduced to specks of dandruff in his scalp for a commercial, and finally, as the studio in which they are trapped shrinks into a black box lifted by helicopter and dropped from a great height, cheerfully and monstrosity crushing them underfoot. Translated into terms of fantasy, this is as good an image as

any for the capricious fate that makes Rafelson's heroes break away from familiar securities, only to find themselves still competing desperately for some sort of shelter.

The difference between *Stay Hungry* (United Artists) and the earlier films—apart from the obvious one that Craig Blake (Jeff Bridges) is allowed to find a way out of the impasse—is that the terms of reference are objective rather than subjective. With the Jack Nicholson character in *Five Easy Pieces*, who has opted for redneck oil-drilling instead of the concert platform, it is clear that he is shying away from an element of artistic chichi in his background, but the mainspring for his rebellion remains rooted, obscure and inarticulate, within himself. In the case of Craig Blake, the mechanism is out in the open. Expected to maintain tradition in the family steel business after his parents' death in a plane crash, he prefers, like any young man worth his salt, to strike out on his own.

So, camping out in the elegant family mansion on 'the mountain' that represents the ultimate in old-style Southern aspiration for the citizens of Birmingham, Alabama, meanwhile trekking down to the high-rise city centre for a business venture in association with the property development hoodlums who represent the new source of wealth and status, he begins to find his own road through an encounter with the gentle body-builder Joe Santo (Arnold Schwarzenegger), a magically mysterious mentor in a Batman mask who demonstrates by example the simple (yet difficult) art of living. All very accessible compared to the elusive and complex allusions of *The King of Marvin Gardens*, yet enormously attractive, not only because Rafelson has been able to give free rein to his gift for fantasy, but because in tackling for the first time material that isn't his own (a novel by Charles Gaines), he has contrived to add wholly consistent subjective undertones.

The opening images of the film show Craig drifting moodily through a woodland glade, riding bareback with gun at his side while a quiet, even voice—revealed to be that of his Uncle Albert reciting a letter—commiserates with his grief and urges him to 'seek the comforts of his traditions'. Yet as the romantic melancholy of the scene suggests, with its echoes of Chateaubriand's noble savage and Rousseau's natural man, Craig has already found an alternative tradition; and when he also meets a ready-made model in Joe Santo,

he is able—unlike the brothers in *The King of Marvin Gardens*—to begin living in terms of his fantasy.

The dual irony here is that fantasies tend to dissolve as soon as reality intrudes, and that Joe Santo in fact stands for everything that Craig thinks he is rejecting: success, status, tradition, and even (the lovely little scene in which Joe turns a crystal goblet in his hand with connoisseur's delight) an appreciation of beauty, elegance and aristocracy. What Joe represents, through his paradoxical but perfectly proportioned balance between a delicate sensibility and a fantastically developed muscular physique, is a kind of natural harmony, an alliance between an unquenchable curiosity ('Stay hungry and you'll taste life') and a chameleon ability to adapt to circumstance. And the point that this harmony is not anybody's just for the asking is made in the joyous yet oddly desolating scene in which Joe tries to open Craig's eyes to a new world by taking him to a hootenanny way out in the wilds of moonshine country. Joe and his fiddle blend instantly with the group of grizzled, rustic musicians; but Craig—dragged into the centre by an old drunk, and casting off his initial embarrassment to throw himself into the dance—obstinately remains an outsider, grotesque amid grotesques just because he doesn't belong, he is *miming* involvement.

Priding himself on his new-found liberty, Craig is still so trapped by convention that he cannot accept the gift, freely made by herself and by Joe, of Mary Tate (Sally Field), whose love he gradually erodes by constant worrying about her enigmatic involvement with Joe. And it is not until the long and superbly controlled society party sequence, not dissimilar to the *Règle du Jeu* masked ball in its revelation of subtle cruelties as Craig proudly shows off his two 'real' people as though they were freaks, that he realises how much he is still part and parcel of the country club ethos. Duly chastened, he apologises to Joe and Mary Tate, but Rafelson still has to effect a harmonious blend between the fantasy Craig has embraced and the reality he has rejected. On stage at the Mr. Universe contest, with golden rays illuminating the cyclorama sky and suggesting the dawn of the Sun King, the stage slowly rises to reveal Joe Santo and his rival for the title frozen in statuesque poses. Meanwhile, heedless of the god he has hitherto worshipped, Craig has rushed off in search of Mary Tate, just in time to rescue her from the clutches of the lecherous show sponsor (R. G. Armstrong); and the rest of the muscle-men, worried that the sponsor has made off with the prize money, have erupted into the streets for a wild pursuit gradually metamorphosed into a mysterious communion as, with muscle-men posing on bus-tops and citizens joyfully essaying their postures, fantasy overtakes the reality of Birmingham.

Writing a last letter to his importunate Uncle Albert, at last aware of the import of the latter's confession that suddenly made him seem almost human (his joy, while keeping his nose to the family grindstone, in watching squirrels in the trees), Craig finally understands the truth that the film is all about. That every man has his dream, and every man has his reality; the problem is to make them coexist.

TOM MILNE



'The Outlaw Josey Wales'

in his superhuman expertise can appear oddly unformed and unprepared in other contexts. *High Plains Drifter* provided the most ironic explanation, interpreting the riddle of the inscrutable Eastwood persona as a supernatural phenomenon; *The Outlaw Josey Wales* (Columbia-Warner) treats it rather as a communal crossword, on which a number of characters, assorted pilgrims inadvertently acquired by Josey while in pursuit of his revenge, set their own impressions.

A rambling, picaresque tale, set against the background of the Civil War and the hatreds engendered by the Kansas-Missouri guerrilla skirmishes, the film begins a trifle awkwardly with a kind of double prologue in which the Man with No Name is born all over again. In an idyllic woodland setting, Josey is briefly glimpsed as family man and farmer, before being delivered from these roles (which, given the incongruity of Eastwood in a crushed hat standing behind a plough, scarcely seem to belong to him anyway) by a group of Union 'Redleg' marauders led by Captain Terrill (Bill McKinney) who destroy the farm and kill his wife and son. Subsequently joining a band of Confederate raiders, Josey emerges from the war (which is marvellously encapsulated in a bleached-out montage behind the credits) with an awesome reputation as a gunfighter and a continuing lust for revenge.

To plunge him deeper into his obsession, the film then has him witness a second outrage, as the rest of his company surrender themselves to Union troops and are mown down while reciting their new oath of allegiance; the massacre is attended by Captain Terrill, and watched in horror by the Confederates' leader, Fletcher (John Vernon), who had received thirty pieces of silver for bringing in his men. Josey descends on the camp like a whirlwind, single-handedly exacts retribution, and disappears as the Union commander orders Fletcher to join Terrill in hunting him down. Fletcher's regretful comment—'He'll have to run for it now. And hell is where he's headed'—adds the appropriate mystical seal to the legend, before the film proper, as it were, brings him down to earth.

Eastwood puts his own baroque stamp on these early sequences, covering the action in short elliptical bursts and signalling the intensity of Josey's bereavement with some extreme low

angles. Perhaps the most striking image in the film (beautifully photographed overall by Bruce Surtees) shows Josey in a head-on telephoto shot huddled next to his family's grave on the brow of a hill, behind which a line of ragged, bearded men eerily materialise to invite him to expiate his grief by joining their own guerrilla band. After the action-packed preamble, however, the style slows to accommodate a more diffusely conversational Western. The running battle between Josey and his equally obsessed pursuer, Terrill, is gradually impeded as the company of vagrants and pioneers casually, grudgingly accumulated by Josey drag him from the killing ground of Missouri to the promised land of Texas.

To an extent, Eastwood's direction sits a little heavily on the more whimsical passages in the plot, though he creditably allows a large portion of it to be taken over by Chief Dan George as Lone Watie, the aged Indian who adopts Josey as a companion when he fails to get the drop on him for bounty. Ignoring Josey's protests about 'unfinished business in Missouri', he insists that they should head for Mexico; his subsequent commentary on Indian affairs ranges eccentrically from the lament that his own people have never been the same since the white men dubbed them the 'civilised tribe' to wry bemusement at the newspaper rhetoric ('Indians Vow to Endeavour to Persevere') that has masked the theft of their land.

Josey's eventual arrival at a homestead in Texas, in the company not only of Lone Watie but of a waspish old-lady pioneer, her half-crazy granddaughter, and one or two disaffected cowboys, effectively returns him to the place where he began. The ironic twist is that where Eastwood first appeared to be a token farmer waiting to be transformed into the legendary gunfighter, he is cast at the end as a kind of domesticated myth, the presiding spirit of this makeshift family and, in all areas of activity except where his gunmanship is concerned, its most passive member. His passivity in fact determines much of the humour of the film; and in this respect, Josey's complaint about unfinished business in Missouri (combined with the title of the original novel, *Gone to Texas*) captures just the right note of vacancy and abrupt dispossession. The Man with No Name doesn't live here any more.

RICHARD COMBS

The Outlaw Josey Wales

Since Clint Eastwood assumed the hats of both actor and director, his films, not surprisingly, have been busily redefining the myth of the Man with No Name. What is surprising is how irreverent the process has become, admitting that every *macho* trait has its comic inverse. The hard-boiled loner and wandering man of mystery is also something of a social freak; the gunfighter whose whole existence is concentrated

The Shootist

After the opening minutes of *The Shootist* (CIC), there can no longer be any doubt—John Wayne has passed beyond the bounds of earthly film stars and is now a full-grown myth. We are introduced to the past exploits of the character he plays, one John Bernard Books, a rare surviving gunman from the Old West, via black and white clips from previous John Wayne movies (or at least those movies controlled by Paramount). The Wayne of 1976 is older, of course, and so is Books: the voice is husky, the gait uncertain, the eyes tired. In fact he's dying, a process which takes the entire movie and many swigs from a laudanum bottle. All this happens in Carson City, Nevada, 1901, a place simply teeming with non-mythic film stars. The diagnosis of cancer is made by James Stewart; Books finds lodgings with Lauren Bacall; the town undertaker is John Carradine; assorted visitors and pests include Richard Boone and Sheree North. After eight days of increasing pain, Books dons his best clothes and takes the horse-drawn trolley to the Metropole saloon, where a gathering of unfriendly faces is waiting to greet him; the shootist, true to his profession, dies in a shoot-out.

Whether designed as a swan-song or not, *The Shootist* is an exceedingly strange affair, both for Wayne and its director Don Siegel. The themes it touches on are now commonplace. There is the ageing gunman neatly reaching the end of his life early in the new century, where his ethical code no longer operates; round him gather journalists, local politicians and ancient floozies, eager to capitalise on his demise and turn him into a money-spinning property. Far less commonplace is the stylistic method adopted by Siegel and his screenwriters (working from a novel by Glendon Swarthout). Every element—structure, characterisation, dramatic incident, the soundtrack music—is pared down to a degree surprising for an American Western. The intimate qualities suggest instead Japanese cinema; one thinks of Kurosawa's *Ikiru*, with its portrait of a civil servant suffering from stomach cancer. Books proves a far more colourful character than Kurosawa's hero, yet we are told precious little about him—except that his gun hasn't been idle and he's notched up an impressive list of enemies among dead men's relatives. And we are told even less about Lauren Bacall's Bond Rogers, the widow with whom he begins a tentative relationship. Bond's son Gillom (Ron Howard) completes the trio of central characters; outside these, the supporting players appear in a series of separate, cumulative encounters with the man vainly trying to die in peace.

Certainly it's bracing to find a Hollywood movie pursuing its chosen theme and style with such resolution, but one can't help wondering whether things haven't been stripped too bare for comfort. The simplicity seems studied, something imposed on the material rather than developed organically from within. Tiny details jar: two cartwheels roll by in the foreground during an early street scene, creating a strong but implausible opening composition for the camera; later Gillom annoys his mother by whistling a fragment of Joplin's *Maple Leaf Rag*, a tune far more popular now than it would have been in the Carson City of 1901. But there are larger faults. Some of the cameo encounters are sharply and wittily presented (Carradine's unctuous, cadaverous undertaker, for instance, offering to embalm Books and provoking the dry comment, 'I admire a man with get-up-and-go'); in others, the script and acting hang fire. Whole scenes are shaped so clearly towards one particular end that they become dangerously trite—Books and Bond's ride in the country, for instance, where their relationship begins to cement as they enjoy the scenery's natural beauty and swap Christian names. And the film's final stages, far from being the most

affecting, recall the ludicrous manipulations of soap opera, with Books meeting a sweet young girl on the trolley and Gillom swallowing manfully outside the saloon as the old man meets his fate.

For all that, *The Shootist* isn't to be shrugged off lightly. Wayne's performance is masterly, and the irritating character traits pounced on by recent directors and writers are pleasantly absent. John Bernard Books is neither boringly sententious nor boringly boorish like Rooster Cogburn; he is simply a man of great strength almost broken by pain, struggling to keep his dignity. And Lauren Bacall provides an equally vibrant partner, gradually and delicately changing her feelings towards him from stifled hostility to affection.

GEOFF BROWN

Picnic at Hanging Rock

A l'ombre, as Proust so neatly put it, *des jeunes filles en fleurs*. In a series of dreamily lazy dissolves, Peter Weir sets the mood and method of *Picnic at Hanging Rock* (GTO Films). St. Valentine's Day, 1900. As a finishing school for young ladies bustles about the business of waking up, languorous images melt into each other in a rustle of murmured tags of poetry, excited giggles, exchanged gifts and secretive glances. Loving fingers arrange a rose in a flower-press. Tarot cards are laid out on a bed with ominous yearning. And before the time comes to troop downstairs, the nascent dreams and desires are obediently stifled as a row of girls pull valiantly on each other's tightening corset strings.

Over it all, previously glimpsed behind the credits as a girl's voice mourns the intangibility of these desires—'What we see and what we seem are but a dream, a dream within a dream'—towers the glowering volcanic mass of Hanging Rock, the only hint as yet that we are not in the safety of Victorian England but in Australia, not so far removed from the threat of the outback. Already, even before the coach due to take the girls on their special picnic treat drives up to wait respectfully in the background like a hearse, signs of tension are evident. During the opening montage, a cool voice of reason emerged from the morass of innocent, hot-house romanticism: 'You must learn to love someone else apart from me, Sarah; I won't be here much longer.' Now this same Sarah, soon waving a forlorn goodbye from the roof, learns that she is the only pupil considered unworthy of the treat. 'That makes

Swan-song of a gunfighter: John Wayne in 'The Shootist'



two of us!' snaps a downtrodden junior mistress. And behind this mysterious resentment, the starched, straight-backed headmistress (Rachel Roberts) begins to loom with the menace of Mrs. Danvers.

Weir caps this opening movement of the film with an absolutely superb shot. As four girls set off to explore the Rock itself—three to disappear mysteriously after overstepping the bounds reluctantly granted, one to return hysterical and unable to explain—he cuts to a high-angle shot down on the rest of the party frozen in exquisitely elegant yet shamelessly carnal attitudes of post-prandial satiation. Like a painting by Auguste Renoir of the *bon bourgeois* at play, it evokes that magical moment when nature somehow contrives to unloose the bonds of convention. The theme, unfortunately, is not always allowed to speak for itself in this way. Perhaps because Joan Lindsay's novel never provides any explanation for the disappearance of the three girls—so maintaining the illusion of being a speculation on a real-life incident that a myth seems to have grown up that the novel was based on a genuine *fait-divers*—Weir seems to feel obliged to compensate not merely by elaborating hints, but by over-stressing those hints.

'Waiting a million years—just for us!' one of the girls remarks with heavy significance after the maths mistress delivers a lecture (itself somewhat loaded) on the volcanic origins of Hanging Rock. Even worse, just before meeting her doom, one of the girls looks down at her fellow-pupils far below and begins to analyse the insignificance of human existence as though suddenly invaded by the spirit of Darwin. Gradually all the portents, swelled by slow-motion and symbolic swans, accumulate a weight the film cannot bear, and it slides inevitably into woolly melodrama, with the headmistress literally turning into Mrs. Danvers and going mad over the suicide (or possibly murder) of the orphaned pupil she has cruelly victimised and who has—oh, dear—a beloved long-lost brother lurking unrecognised nearby in employment as a groom.

A pity, because when the film works, it works beautifully, as in the superb sequence, effortlessly welding space, time and setting into an indivisible whole, where the girls drift past another picnicking party, an elderly English couple whose very proper nephew (Dominic Guard) steals away for a flirtation across the class boundaries with native manners (a young Australian groom with a bottle) before being drawn into equally tantalising uncharted territory as he watches one of the passing girls delicately raise her skirt to cross a stream. His subsequent involvement to the point of obsession with the mystery—beautifully adumbrated by a cut, as he is questioned by a policeman about his feelings during the brief moment when he saw the girls passing, to a tranquil, shimmering sheet of water (he is now, in fact, brooding alone at a lakeside garden party)—is one of the unquestionable successes of the film, clear, pure and uncontaminated by the overstatement running riot elsewhere. As with his first feature, *The Cars That Ate Paris*, all the very talented Peter Weir needs is a little discipline, either self- or other-imposed.

TOM MILNE

Welcome to Britain

There seems little likelihood of prospective viewers confusing Ben Lewin's documentary with the 1943 documentary directed by Anthony Asquith, long since forgotten by all but British film historians; if this should happen, however, the shock would be very nasty indeed. In 1943 a film could be called *Welcome to Britain* without the remotest suggestion of irony. The recipients of our hospitality were American soldiers, who enjoyed a guided tour of the English way of life at the hands of Burgess Meredith, including

everything from our quaint spelling to the British taste in beer. The visitors in Lewin's *Welcome to Britain* (Cinegate)—mostly hailing from India, Pakistan and Cyprus—receive no welcome at all, except from the sign above the traffic tunnels leading out of Heathrow Airport. For many of them, the only part of England they see is the view from a net enclosure at a Harmondsworth 'detention centre', where they are unceremoniously dumped while government officials ponder over the country's clumsy immigration laws.

Lewin is a former National Film School student and the maker of a wry documentary on English channel swimming entitled *Dear Mr. Barber, I'd Like to Swim the Channel* (Mr. Barber being a lorry driver who trains young hopefuls). The subject matter in the present documentary, a BFI Production Board film, is just as bizarre but far less innocuous, and Lewin is careful to include all sides in his study of the prospective immigrants and their problems. We meet Alex Lyon, the former Minister of State, who sits in a plush chair looking and sounding perfectly reasonable ('We do exercise the benefit of the doubt in many cases, and we do make mistakes'); we meet the workers of the government-sponsored advisory service, UKIAS, whose advice—in the instance shown—seems limited to the two words, 'Be patient'; we meet the people caught up in this whirlwind of red tape, people both articulate and inarticulate (one of them admits to living in Britain for 'half past three' years). But one man dominates the investigation: Reuben Davis, who runs an advisory service for profit and is described by Alex Lyon as 'the kind of engaging con-man who works in the East End selling plates.'

It soon becomes clear that Lewin isn't trying to map out the whys and wherefores of the matter, at least explicitly. Davis (nicknamed 'Mr. Fix-It') takes up so much of the film because he is the richest character on offer, the most entertaining means for Lewin to focus on this unhappy area. Lewin's camera accompanies



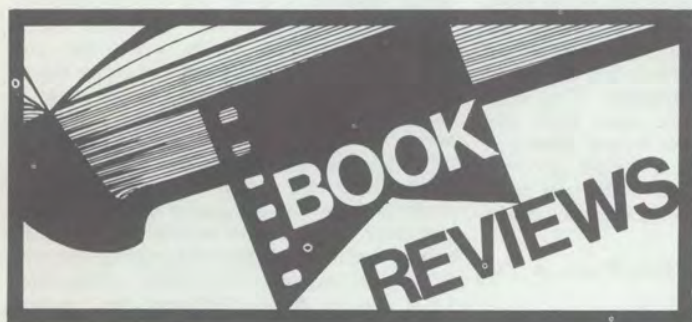
'Welcome to Britain'

him on his roving from his Harringay headquarters to Whitehall, to Dover, to a barber's shop, and we watch the way he operates with a mixture of amusement and horrified disbelief. Davis has no truck with subtlety or tact: over the phone he tells one Home Office employee, 'Change your name to Mr. Schmuck!' At the Court of Appeal he enters the court-room wearing a colonial pith helmet; his attempts to defend his client usually result in the presiding judge wearily pronouncing, 'Don't answer that question—it's irrelevant.'

'Were you surprised at the things you saw?'

Davis asks Lewin, who ends his film at this point with a freeze-frame, thus ingeniously saving himself the trouble of answering. But the question requires no answer. What makes *Welcome to Britain* so fascinating, and so dispiriting at the same time, is that conditions on all fronts seem intolerable. One ends up not knowing whether to be more astonished at the inefficiency and inhumanity of Whitehall bureaucracy or more appalled at the brazen shenanigans of 'Mr. Fix-It', who seems the only ally the luckless immigrants can find.

GEOFF BROWN



PERSONAL VIEWS: Explorations in Film

By Robin Wood

GORDON FRASER, £5.90

Film is not the easiest of subjects to tackle in the classroom. Unlike a book or a painting, a film presents practical problems of sharing; shown complete, it separates class and teacher for two hours or so, shown in extract form it is affected by all kinds of dislocations and misapprehensions. Of all the arts, it's the one that *has* to be discussed in retrospect—which makes it the one least likely to find unanimity among its students. As a result, the film teacher quickly becomes a specialist in metaphor and paraphrase—and above all in interpretation. He provides a substitute for the experience on the screen in order to identify his

students' reactions to it. Whereas the critic can be as dogmatic as he likes, the teacher must be flexible, cautious and even indecisive, so that other opinions can be drawn out and given room to breathe.

Given such distinctions, it could be argued that critic and teacher should be kept separate, that critics should be read and teachers heard; the critic's value is that he doesn't change, the teacher's that he can constantly adapt. The confusion that can result from the intermingling of functions is illustrated in Robin Wood's collection of essays, some adapted from lectures, others from critical articles; labelled 'personal views', they ramble across a wide range of opinions, claims and responses—too wide to be analysed in anything less than a book of similar size, yet too narrow to afford a

solid foundation from which fresh approaches to cinematic theory might be undertaken. For Mr. Wood, as his title suggests, is unquestionably an explorer, his horizons changing at every turn; as a teacher, his message is that no film statement is unequivocal, no conclusions more than tentative.

As a critic, Mr. Wood devotes a third of his book to the panning of other critics, who, to be fair, seem to have got their attacks in first. He delivers a fine broadside against the 'laboriousness of current semiological analysis' as represented by *Screen*, and then gets to work on impressionist, modernist, and avant-garde criticism, all with such reasoned good sense that one is forced to wonder whether a successful case could ever be made in their support. He is a great admirer of Victor Perkins, with whom he argues for eight pages, and acknowledges an even greater debt to Peter Wollen, whose *Signs and Meanings* he describes as 'probably the most influential book on film in English of the past decade'; and a paragraph later, rather disconcertingly, as 'a text I find less convincing every time I return to it.' He argues with Wollen over Hawks for a full chapter, and appears to get the better of him.

Arguments over critical theory are fine for the theorists, who pre-

sumably will have encountered and answered them in the magazines in which they first appeared. They seem somewhat forced in book form, but doubtless have value for those who have the original texts and wish to compare notes. For unbiased bystanders, such essays allow a perspective on Robin Wood's own life and times that has relatively little to do with the cinema but makes for good autobiography: he tells us about Tolstoy, Fra Filippo Lippi's 'Annunciation', the importance of Leavis, Mozart ('nothing is ever going to come between me and *The Magic Flute*'), the distinction between Romantic and Classic, what it's like to live with Schubert's *Winterreise* ('it's with me while I do the cooking or fiddle about the garden'), and his own love life. With frank and insistent honesty, Mr. Wood reveals all: 'I believe in art, in democracy, and in the value of the individual life.'

After 94 pages, he switches to *The Scarlet Empress*, somewhat without warning (von Sternberg hasn't previously entered the argument), and settles down to some first-class analytical writing. He is excellent on Ophuls, good on Welles, valuable on Jacques Tourneur, and solid on Mizoguchi, although a chapter on children in films (which apologetically juxtaposes *Meet Me in St Louis* with

Night of the Living Dead reads too sketchily to get very far. Like his indispensable books on Hitchcock and Bergman, these are teaching notes from which any classroom would benefit, and they do more than his more direct protestations to support his claim to 'unreconstructed humanism'. And his investigation into the current status of the 'auteur' theory, via examples from Sturges, Hitchcock, Hawks and Ophuls, while it leads characteristically to no very definite conclusion, sets up a modest counterbalance to the strategies dismissed at the start of the book. There is a tendency to deal in superlatives which then have to be overlooked (Tourneur, having been credited with 'the most delicate poetic fantasy in American cinema' in one chapter, gets demoted by Mizoguchi ten pages later), and there is surely an inconsistency in the way Mr. Wood acknowledges his debt to other theories and approaches only to boast how he benefits from his ignorance of Japan. But as a critic Wood is precise, and as a teacher he's human.

PHILIP STRICK

THE NEW WAVE

By James Monaco

OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS, £9.95

A writer whose methods immediately evoke the mood and dynamics of an energetic classroom, James Monaco restricts *The New Wave* to the five film-making alumni of *Cahiers du Cinéma* most often identified with that label: Truffaut, Godard, Chabrol, Rohmer and Rivette. Considering the dearth of books in English on the subject (only Peter Graham's anthology and Raymond Durgnat's early monograph—both long out of print, and the latter unmentioned in the present book—qualify as predecessors), it is a fertile field for any critic interested in organising a lot of diverse material, and this task is handled by Monaco with grace and assurance; for its bibliography alone, this over-priced volume is well worth having. Beginning with an evocation of Rivette's first encounters with Godard and Truffaut (and later Chabrol and Rohmer) at the Avenue de Messine Cinémathèque, in 1949 or 1950, he proceeds to the films of each until, some 320 pages later, he has burrowed his way through over a hundred features and shorts.

Lots of grist for the mill; but what kind of product is the Monaco factory manufacturing? Three-quarters of the text is given over to Truffaut and Godard, with the latter getting twice the space of the former, and each of the other three sharing roughly a tenth of the book apiece. The point of this arithmetic isn't to question Monaco's priorities but to identify them—although it may be that the unavailability in the U.S. of several films by Rohmer, Chabrol and Rivette at least partially dictated the proportions. Perhaps

not coincidentally, Truffaut and Godard are also the figures Monaco appears to be most comfortable discussing; the first two sections bristle with confident assertions, while the others seem altogether more questioning and tentative.

On Truffaut, he writes with the ardour of a committed fan—passionately defending *Domicile Conjugal*, and even finding extended interest in *Une Belle Fille Comme Moi*—taking as his principal guideline two questions which he sees being posed again and again in the films: 'Are films more important than life?' and 'Are women magic?' On Godard, he is equally comprehensive but somewhat more guarded; by the time he reaches *Pravda*, serious political objections have cropped up, and near the end of this section he confesses that 'There is something absolutely and inherently hollow about the abstraction of the intellect.' But the predominant tone is much more upbeat, and he concludes that Godard's art 'leaves me breathless'.

Chabrol, treated as the most commercial of the group, a specialist in 'films noirs in colour', is accorded a relatively terse summary, with abbreviated judgments occasionally taking the place of analyses (André Jocelyn is deemed 'a nearly total disaster' in *Ophélie*, with no explanation offered as to how or why); but the general claim that Chabrol is often taken more seriously by critics than by himself is agreeably substantiated by a witty quote from the director. Rohmer's smaller oeuvre is approached somewhat more respectfully, with the director regarded as 'very much a modern thinker, at least as compared with the Henry James of the turn of the century. Rohmer takes things much less seriously,' and as someone who 'has allied himself with contemporary film theorists like Straub, Fassbinder, Rossellini and . . . Godard, who have sought to extend the boundaries of the permissible in film language.' Rivette, mainly seen in terms of his experiments with narrative—but with interesting passing comments on his use of rhythmical and musical structures—is regarded ambivalently as a more difficult and esoteric figure than any of the others.

Monaco oddly fails to consider any part of Rohmer and Rivette's extensive careers as critics, which offer multiple clues about their film-making, while the more modest critical efforts of Chabrol are discussed at some length. More seriously, in his efforts to keep his study up-to-date with spanking new concepts and references, he can seem a bit hasty at times in his use of terminology. Words like 'existential', 'structural', 'formalist' and 'materialist' have acquired usages too specific to allow for broader applications without risking serious confusion, and to describe (say) Truffaut's and Chabrol's post-synchronised films as 'materialist' only makes sense if one ignores entirely the

FILMS ON OFFER

Compiled by Nigel Algar and Steve Jenkins of the Central Booking Agency, **FILMS ON OFFER 1976**, just published, is a completely revised edition of this familiar publication. It now provides a fully comprehensive listing of *all* feature films currently available on 16mm in Britain together with details of their distributors and hire fees. It also includes a selective guide to short films. It has been re-indexed according to film title in strict alphabetical order and a director cross-index added. Although invaluable to film users, **FILMS ON OFFER** should also form a useful reference work for those not directly concerned with booking films, as each film listed is accompanied by details of its director, country of production, date and running time. Copies are sent free of charge to *Corporate* Members of the Institute, but copies are available for individual members and others from the Publications Department at £1.25 plus postage of 50p.

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'materialist' implications of the direct sound used by Godard and Rivette.

In terms of new material, an unpublished interview with Rivette furnishes the Introduction and last chapter with a number of helpful facts. Less satisfactory are the accounts of Rivette's recent films, which abound in errors: at the end of *Spectre*, Bulle Ogier is said to be 'still at the house' rather than driving off to Paris, while the 'empty' shots of Place d'Italie are wrongly described as being devoid of people; and the 'inner plot' of *Celine et Julie* is provided with a wholly imaginary resolution in which Camille is 'seen' smothering Madlyn while her rival Sophie is presumably absolved of all guilt.

But in the overall context of *The New Wave*, many of these objections can be written off as quibbles. The fact remains that such a volume is long overdue, and Monaco's ease in marshalling his sources is well worth attending to. Above all, he conveys the distinct impression that despite all the similarities in taste and background that originally linked these five directors under a common banner, the distances separating them today are often much more striking.

JONATHAN ROSENBAUM

THE DEVIL FINDS WORK

By James Baldwin

MICHAEL JOSEPH, £3.00

In part responding to old movies as strands in the fabric of sensibility—Joan Crawford seemed to wear sunlight in *Dance, Fools, Dance*—in part, and to a greater extent, using more recent films as illustrations to a personal theme, James Baldwin has written a commentary on the movies as visionary, and unusual, as D. H. Lawrence's *Studies in Classical American Literature*.

The nature of his theme is hinted at in a recalling of a moment (the moment) of apostasy—when Baldwin decided to go to a proscribed theatre matinee, and in so doing, put in peril his religious calling. Many years later, while watching *The Exorcist*, he tries to think his way back into feelings once aroused by a religious vocation. He is mindful of a friend's criticism of this film. 'So, we must be careful—lest we lose our faith—and become possessed.' He sees *The Exorcist* as an example of the power to possess that movies may have in an age almost without faith—and dismisses it for its 'hysterical banality'. In dismissing it, though, he enriches us by invoking once more his vision of life as an experience both terrible and terrifying (favoured adjectives in his apocalyptic). He believes that black people, and certain other threatened (and threatening) social outsiders, are the last custodians to this experience—which movies, in general, betray.

Apart from *The Birth of a Nation* (appalled, he acknowledges it to be a masterpiece: 'an elaborate justification of mass murder,' it

has the Niagara force of an obsession') and *You Only Live Once* (he warns to its 'claustrophobic physicality'), all the films he writes about veer somewhere between the fourth- and fifth-rate. But minute sins can be the pretext for great sermons, and James Baldwin rails at length, and sonorously, against the emollient distorting of terrifying lives that occurs in *Lady Sings the Blues*, or *Lawrence of Arabia*, or even more strangely, *My Son John*. In *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* and *In the Heat of the Night*, he picks on dishonesties subtly different from those that usually worry the Caucasian.

His enmity is not limited to muddled liberalism. He is sharp about the so-called radical black films of the Seventies, seeing them in some way as annulling the revelation that the blacks hold in divine fee. He is able to give detailed instances of how falsity may creep into a Hollywood treatment—through an unhappy account of working on a script about Malcolm X. Yet the main impression given by this brief book is far from negative. Again and again, he shows how even the most fake film can contain some truth. He has a flair for the unexpected, quickening insight: as when he describes at various times Sylvia Sidney, Ava Gardner and Henry Fonda (because of his gait) as essentially (and commendably) negro, or says that, 'In a way, we were all niggers in the Thirties.'

ERIC RHODE

STAR TURNS

Books on stars are remaindered so quickly now that the premises offering them have abandoned shelves and tables. The glossy volumes are piled on the floor, and if we don't take them at knockdown price they are reduced further, to pulp. Five new ones, markedly different from one another, represent some of the common approaches to stardom. Only one of them seems to me impressive or essential, but it may not be the one that flourishes. There is something mysterious about such books. Who actually reads them or—where reading is not required—skims through them? Are they meant to restore faith in dead or retired luminaries, are they exercises in nostalgia, serious enquiries into stardom or risky book-making?

THE FAIRBANKS ALBUM (Secker & Warburg, £7.50) need not detain you more than an hour, and there must be cheaper ways of passing the time. It is 'Drawn from the Family Archives' by Doug Jr. with an introduction and a thread of captions from Richard Schickel. Doug Sr. would have liked the book: he lived as if astride a double-page spread. But the insubstantiality of the line is evident in Doug Jr.'s later years and the string of celebrities passing his unwithered smile. Large and heavy, it is a slight book with only a few pictures to make one pause: a dishevelled and alarmed Mary Pickford rescued

by Doug from fans in Kensington Gardens; Chaplin hobbling up a path to Doug's funeral—pensive, alone and in spats; and the odd resemblance between Sr.'s third wife, Lady Ashley, and Jr.'s first, Joan Crawford.

Schickel's captions are intriguing hints of the book he had already written, for DOUGLAS FAIRBANKS: THE FIRST CELEBRITY (Elm Tree Books, £3.50) was published in 1973. It is far and away the pick of this bunch, for it goes beyond respectful or penetrating journalese and probes high stardom itself. Schickel's claim for Fairbanks as an original is well supported, and while his theory of the twentieth century's invention of celebrity is offered economically it is persuasive. Thus, after the First World War, the movies projected several individuals who, within years, became the best known people in the world, glamorous and not quite human, but likely to falter under the weight of attention. Doug was a star in the mainstream of Americana: not an exotic like Valentino, or a winsome failure like Chaplin. He stood for the ordinary guy who succeeded through pluck, enterprise, cheerfulness, humour and vitality, and turned fluent motion into a style. Schickel is very appreciative of this energetic poetry and evokes it vividly, just as he underlines Doug's early use of weaklings who discover a laughing Atlas in themselves, versions of the common viewer transformed in watching.

But Doug's glory, like one of his leaps, had to land. As he grew older, he became heavy and grumpy. He stumbled at the end of some flights and flinched from sound: ease is a total trick and any anxiety wrinkles it. United Artists was a fine idea not persevered with, and the storybook marriage to Mary Pickford succumbed to his hurt at a failing career and his spoiled need to escape in trips, socialising and passing affairs. The pitfalls that await the celebrity allow Schickel to explore his theme, and he is good on the Hollywood marriage, the insipid court of Pickfair and the public's wish for stars to fall. This is not a long book, but the author feels for Fairbanks and the enquiry is far-reaching and elegantly written.

Alexander Walker's RUDOLPH VALENTINO (Elm Tree Books, £2.75) is in the same series as Schickel's book, but with more illustrations and less text. Valentino still seems a vague creature, the instrument of several commanding women, variously a clothes-horse, a figure in Natacha Rambova's designs, an actor aspiring to 'art' film and an androgyne perplexed by the suggestions of his films. He now seems stilted and camp, and even the manly Doug was sexless. Sex in Valentino amounts only to pallid decadence, while Doug popularised suntan. The illustrations indicate a gloomy poseur, and Walker does not properly investigate Valentino's obscure sexual character. This book and the Great Lover's films suggest that any revival of

Valentino will have to reinvent him if we are to be held.

CAGNEY BY CAGNEY (New English Library, £3.95) sounds like the retired actor: gruff, old-fashioned and reserved. It is a grudging book, neither boasting nor revealing, choosing to see its subject's life as uncomplicated. Whereas Cagney is the most diverse and intriguing of stars, an everyman figure who pursues a great American subject—the release of energy—to both destructive and creative ends. In CAGNEY: THE ACTOR AS AUTEUR (Tantivy Press, £5.00) Patrick McGilligan takes us through Cagney's career, narrating films, surveying reviews and sorting a tangle of recollections—for instance, who thought of the grapefruit in *Public Enemy*? He is especially interesting on the way the young actor's battles with Warners overlapped with his political awareness and the fierce anti-social characters he played. It is well researched if rather awkwardly written, more a serious tribute than an adequate discussion of the actor as auteur.

Three chapters analyse Cagney's screen character, but the measure of auteurism is kept to lines Cagney improvised, bits of business he invented and stories he liked. These are valuable details, but an actor is a constant, helpless auteur, the sun in his films. Doug was such a creative force, and self-doubt halted him. Cagney surged right on, faithful to energy. His own off-hand dismissal of his performances will not be history's verdict. As time goes by, he looks sharper than ever, the radical tough of the 1930s, as witness the inspired use of him in *Brother, Can You Spare a Dime*?

DAVID THOMSON

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

RONALD CHRIST edits *Review*, the magazine of the Centre for Inter-American Relations. . . LUCY FISCHER is a researcher/writer at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, teaches film at New York University, and is writing a book on Jacques Tati. . . STUART HALL is director of the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies at the University of Birmingham. . . STEVEN KOVACS teaches at Stanford University and has written for *Film Quarterly* and other magazines. . . MARI KUTTNA is a journalist, translator and film critic who revisits Hungary regularly. . . GAVIN MILLAR is a BBC producer and director and film critic of *The Listener*. . . ROBERT PORFIRIO teaches at California State University and is working on a doctoral dissertation on *film noir* for the Department of American Studies at Yale. . . MICHAEL RADFORD is a freelance director working in film and television and was involved in drawing up the Association of Independent Producers' submission to the Annan Committee. . . DAVID THOMSON has taught film in America and is the author of *Movie Man* and *A Biographical Dictionary of the Cinema*.

Letters

British Documentary

SIR,—In reviewing the book by Elizabeth Sussex, *The Rise and Fall of British Documentary*, Stuart Hood begins his winding-up paragraph by saying: 'One of the unanswered questions in the collection of interviews with survivors from the founding generation of documentary film is why so few of them were able to make the transition to the new medium' (i.e. television).

The answer, surely, is that the BBC (a) did not want to have the film-makers telling it how to set about its own business; (b) had no desire to pay long-established film directors the sort of money they would want; and (c) preferred to train the raw material of the on-coming generation in the new techniques from scratch and in its (the BBC's) own chosen manner. Though the sense behind such an attitude is obvious, the resulting waste of talent was deplorable—particularly as documentary already had other problems.

It was around this time, for instance, that sponsorship in the non-theatrical field took a turn towards the informational (or technological) and away from the sociological approach. Though no one would decry the incidence of one alongside the other, it was regrettable that the situation became unbalanced. In addition, it has to be remembered that Wardour Street always fought shy of *non-entertainment* films—as it liked to call the documentary product—and that the health of the documentary movement was further imperilled by the winding up of the Crown Film Unit.

On the plus side, however, the documentary dramas of recent television are, a little ironically, carrying the documentary banner where, before, it could hardly ever contrive to go—because the early documentary could rarely afford sync sound and so, obviously, had to manage for the most part without dialogue. This was responsible for the almost blanket use of commentary—the death knell for all but those films saved by their visual excitement and imaginative use of sound; it is a fact of life for the medium that the creation of drama from individual—as opposed to mass—humans in conflict is a virtual impossibility without recourse to synchronised dialogue.

It must not be overlooked that the inevitable use of actors (or, for that matter, non-actors) sends the cost rocketing. It scarcely needs saying that quite aside from artistes'

fees there is the need for full crews, for longer rehearsal time, for many more takes per scene, for much longer shooting schedules, and so on. Even so—given the money to pay the higher cost of sync sound—the breakthrough to documentary drama could have occurred before the war. And I feel sure the so necessary writers would have arisen out of the need for them.

Yours faithfully,
DARREL CATLING
Old Hatfield, Herts.

SIR,—Stuart Hood's pettish account of *The Rise and Fall of British Documentary* in your last issue hardly confirms the intellectual snobbery which Lindsay Anderson attributes to SIGHT AND SOUND. It is a sorry successor to Richard Mayne's review in the T.L.S. (June 25, 1976). Perhaps those who, like Mr. Hood, ask rhetorical questions about Grierson's Purposes, ought not to review books about Grierson's Purposes.

No one except Mr. Hood has ever supposed that 'the authentic note of John Grierson' could be captured on a few tapes. Grierson often talked with an apparent contradiction and provocation. Unlike Mr. Hood, he never wrote an undisciplined line in his life. Mr. Hood should hasten himself to sort out the Tapes from the Tablets.

One thinks with a sigh how much easier life might have been if Grierson had been ruthless, vague, tenuous, a manipulator, a fence-sitter, a great public relations man and an astute politician. But no, beyond his dedication to the public service and education, he was too beguiled by the English language, by aesthetics and by philosophy. Perhaps unlike Mr. Hood, he did enjoy the support of a prime minister, to which the National Film Board of Canada is a testament.

Mr. Hood refers to 'sources of patronage' as if they were a disease. What gives him the licence to speak with so malevolent a tongue unless he himself sprang fully trained from the head of Minerva? I take some exception to his libellous notion that 'Shell Oil' saw in its film programme the opportunity to exploit Arab workers. *The Times* (June 27, 1974) quoted Edgar Anstey's judgment that Shell films were associated all over the world with technological development, food and agriculture.

It is sheer impertinence to talk of 'survivors'. Those who ensured the continuity of the British Transport and Shell Film Units had a serenity of purpose unobserved by Mr. Hood. Basil Wright and Stuart Legg remain gifted scholars and creators. Paul Rotha is not one who needs any new evaluation, nor did he suffer any 'confusion' in his unfrivolous life. One would have thought that 'realistic cinema' was enhanced by the ingenuity of Reg Jacob, who devised the letter-sorting sequence in *Night Mail*. Mr. Hood will be pleased to learn that he at least has made a transition to the 'new medium' of

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maintaining historic buildings.

Mr. Hood has done a great disservice to Elizabeth Sussex in attributing to her book his own wildly inaccurate 'anecdote and naive reflection'. The Grierson Industry has inevitably uncovered wounded hearts and vanities which loudly knock to have their passage out. Messrs. Wounded Hearts depend, more than they know, on the discipline, the discretion and the decency of the more senior 'survivors'.

Yours faithfully,
MARGARET ANN ELTON
Clevedon Court, Somerset.

Grierson and Len Lye

SIR,—In his review of *The Rise and Fall of British Documentary* Stuart Hood indignantly refers to Grierson's 'unreflecting cynicism' in relation to Len Lye's *Colour Box*. Why? Len Lye very gladly painted 'the new rates for the parcel post on the last sequence' for the simple reason that Grierson was offering him what all film experimenters seek and usually lack—distribution.

So successful was *Colour Box*—it must have been the only advertising film that exhibitors actually asked for—that Grierson was able to offer Len Lye the finance and facilities for further films, including *Rainbow Dance*, *Trade Tattoo*, and the remarkable non-animation black and white *N or NW*, which anticipated by nearly twenty years the technical 'innovations' of Godard's *A Bout de*

Souffle. All these films carried advertising messages, without which they would never have come into existence.

If that is 'unreflecting cynicism', let's have some more of it.

Yours faithfully,

BASIL WRIGHT
Henley-on-Thames, Oxon.

Latin America

SIR,—I have read in your Summer issue an article by Peter Biskind about the situation of Latin American cinema today. It is true and sad that many movie-makers are going through a dramatic situation in some of the countries of the sub-continent with right wing dictatorships. I admire Mr. Biskind for denouncing with such ardour a situation which revolts anyone who thinks artists should enjoy total freedom to express themselves.

But Mr. Biskind proves also to be a Manicheist; his vision of the seventh art in Latin America is over-simplified. Venezuelan cinema for instance, has never known better times with more films and interesting subjects being made. Mexican cinema (Leduc, Cazals, Ripstein, etc.) is also awakening after a long time of lethargy. Brazilian cinema is, in spite of all, quite alive.

On the other hand, to consider that Cuba is the exception in a wasteland is being totally misinformed (or biased). It is already a well known fact that many of the movie-makers who worked on the

first films made after the fall of dictator Batista, the first times of enthusiasm of the revolution before the disappointment came, have either been forced to go into exile or have been muffled by censors and bureaucrats. Some who remain have also gone to jail, have done forced labour or have been denied visas to emigrate.

Mr. Biskind himself is unable to name any recent Cuban film of the same calibre as the early ones (*Lucia*, *Memories of Underdevelopment*). It is significant that most of the films being shot today in Cuba deal—as often happens in dictatorships—with historical subjects. The present times are obviously too dangerous for directors who have to face sectarian censorship.

Yours faithfully,
LIBORIO GONZALEZ

Barcelona, Spain.

Australian Films

SIR,—I would like to correct a few discrepancies in Jan Dawson's otherwise astute appraisal of Australia's film industry (Spring, 1976).

The comment that Australian audiences 'snubbed' *The Cars That Ate Paris* is, at least, an oversimplification. The fact is that few people ever had the opportunity to see it. Despite its overseas acclaim *Cars* was the subject of poor commercial acceptance on the part of the major theatre chains—and it is in the hands of these monopoly concerns whether a film is to be a success or not. Hence we had the anomaly of two films directed by the same person with a similar style and approach (though, significantly perhaps, not the same type of story), having completely contrasting commercial fortunes. *Picnic at Hanging Rock* was given red-carpet treatment whereas *Cars* opened months after Cannes, in outer city suburbs and with negligible publicity.

However, one cannot lay all the blame at the feet of monopoly cinema chains. Unfortunately, I feel that Peter Weir's claim that Australian audiences found *Cars* 'impure, jumbled and confused' would have been vindicated if better distribution arrangements had been secured. Few really understood *Picnic*, the typical comment being, 'What a nice film'. Hardly very encouraging for serious film-makers.

Undoubtedly there has been a tremendous new maturity in our film industry recently, but unless it is matched by a similar maturity in audiences one cannot really view the future with any real optimism. The forthcoming *Devil's Playground* will test the industry's foundations to the fullest.

A small technical correction: one of the pupils in *Picnic* is murdered—she does not commit suicide—by Mrs. Appleyard (Rachel Roberts), who is the person who actually commits suicide.

Yours faithfully,
PETER C. HOOK
Killara, New South Wales.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

CIC for *Marathon Man*, *The Shootist*, *The Tenant*.

COLUMBIA-WARNER for *The Outlaw Josey Wales*, *Head*, *The King of Marvin Gardens*, *Five Easy Pieces*, *Bonnie and Clyde*.

UNITED ARTISTS for *Stay Hungry*.
EMI for *Buffalo Bill and the Indians*.

FOX-RANK for *Bugsy Malone*.
CINEGATE for *Fox and his Friends*, *Welcome to Britain*.

CONNOISSEUR FILMS for *Les Enfants du Paradis*.

CONTEMPORARY FILMS for *Memories of Underdevelopment*.
THE OTHER CINEMA for photograph of *The Other Cinema*.

SPECTA FILMS for *Playtime*.

ACTION FILMS (PARIS)/CITEL FILMS (GENEVA)/SOCIETE FRANCAISE DE PRODUCTION/SSR TV for *Jonas qui aura 25 ans en l'an 2000*.

ACTION FILMS for *Providence*.

ARGOS FILMS/OSHIMA PRODUCTIONS/SHIBATA ORGANISATION for *Empire of the Senses*.

HUNGAROFILM for *The Unfinished Sentence*, *Holiday in Britain*.
MAFILM for *Sindbad*.

R-K-O RADIO PICTURES for *The Live By Night*, *The Woman in the Window*, *The Racket*, *The Long Night*.

UNIVERSAL PICTURES for *Brute Force*.

UNIVERSAL-INTERNATIONAL for *The Killers*.

INTERCONTINENTAL FILMS for *Farewell, My Lovely*.

WARNER BROS. for *The Maltese Falcon*, *Possessed*, *The Petrified Forest*, *The Mask of Dimitrios*.

COLUMBIA PICTURES for *The Reckless Moment*.

PRC for *Detour*.

20th CENTURY-FOX for *The Dark Corner*, *The Lodger*.

DIANA PRODUCTIONS for *Scarlet Street*.

GREEK FILM CENTRE for *Happy Day*.
JOSE FRADE FILMS for *The Long Holidays of 1936*.

PARAMOUNT PICTURES for photograph of James Wong Howe.
NEW DIRECTIONS for photograph of Jorge Luis Borges.

NICOLETTA ZALAFFI for photograph of Claude Chabrol.

DEREK HILL for photograph of the *Essential Cinema*.

BBC-TV for *Civilisation*, *Monitor*, *Grandstand*, *Monty Python's Flying Circus*.

THAMES TELEVISION for *The Confederacy of Wives*.

GRANADA TELEVISION for *A Family at War*.

LONDON WEEKEND TELEVISION for *Aquarius*.

NATIONAL FILM ARCHIVE for *You Only Live Once*, *Der Mörder*.

Dimitri Karamasoff, Morocco, *Things To Come*, *Freaks*, photograph of Alfred Hitchcock and Alma Reville.

All stills for the article 'No Way Out' are taken from the frame.

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edited by Peter Cowie. Now in a larger format, with full colour cover, the 1977 edition of this famous annual will be the most attractive to date. Directors of the year are Woody Allen, George Cukor, Masaki Kobayashi, Claude Sautet, and Lina Wertmüller. Illustrated. 504 pages. Paperback. £2.50. Published Nov. 3rd.

THE HOLLYWOOD PROFESSIONALS Vol. 5

Clive Denton writes on King Vidor, while Kingsley Canham contributes essays on John Cromwell and Mervyn LeRoy. Detailed filmographies and many illustrations. 192 pages. Paperback. £1.50. Published Nov. 3rd.

CHARACTER PEOPLE

by Ken D. Jones, Arthur F. McClure and Alfred E. Twomey. A tribute to the supporting players who added so much to enjoyment of the Hollywood film; lavishly illustrated with short essays on such figures as Ward Bond, Hume Cronyn, Butterfly McQueen, Kent Smith and Monty Woolley. 209 pages. Hardback. £7.50. Published Nov. 17th.

FILM IN SWEDEN The New Directors

by Stig Björkman. The first in a series devoted to aspects of Swedish cinema, this is a discussion of the work of such directors as Widerberg, Sjöman, Troell, Zetterling, Halldoff, etc. The author is a promising director himself. Illustrated. 128 pages. Hardback. £3.25. Published Nov. 17th.

FOCUS ON FILM No. 25

This specially-enlarged, celebratory issue of our popular journal of film history includes interviews with Martin Scorsese, Clint Eastwood, and editor Margaret Booth; essays on Leslie Howard and early Howard Hawks; an index to American film title changes; and much else. Richly illustrated. 84 pages. 90p. (+ post 10p). Out now.

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Film Guide

*BUFFALO BILL AND THE INDIANS (EMI)

Enlivened by some of the usual Robert Altman procedures, but on the whole a rather monotonous emphasis on social thesis over satirical nuance wears this pageant down. Strong performances from Paul Newman and Burt Lancaster. (Joel Grey, Geraldine Chaplin, Will Sampson.) *Reviewed.*

*BUGSY MALONE (Fox-Rank)

A cute idea (children acting out a pastiche Thirties gangster film) professionally executed, with scaled down sets and blood and booze watered to match. But as a parody it is not very inventive and some of the children (Jodie Foster) seem to have a better idea of what they are imitating than others. (Scott Baio, Florrie Dugger, John Cassisi; director, Alan Parker.) *Reviewed.*

**CELINE AND JULIE GO BOATING (Contemporary)

Jacques Rivette's first comedy and most accessible film to date juxtaposes two actresses and two plots with documentary and magic, in an exhilarating Wonderland adventure about the pleasures of plot-spinning—and the joys and terrors of cinema itself. An absolute must. (Dominique Labourier, Juliet Berto, Bulle Ogier, Marie-France Pisier.)

*FAMILY LIFE (Contemporary)

Richly atmospheric (Chekhovian Gothic) yet typically muted Krzysztof Zanussi film, made in 1971, about a young man making his way in modern Poland who returns home to crumbling mansion, drunken father, deranged sister and the discovery that he hasn't escaped his *haute bourgeoisie* inheritance. (Daniel Olbrychski, Jan Nowicki.)

**FAMILY PLOT (CIC)

Lovely Hitchcock thriller in which the rediscovery of favourite stars (Barbara Harris and Bruce Dern especially) seems to have inspired a return to his true métier: suspense by wit rather than by blood. An irresistible marriage between the English period humour and the American mastery. (Karen Black, William Devane, Cathleen Nesbitt.)

GOODBYE, NORMA JEAN (GTO)

Lugubrious bio-pic purporting to give the run-down on the early career of Marilyn Monroe, but getting pretty run down itself as it ploughs predictably through the exploitations of a heartless society. Seedy and simple-minded, and not much redeemed by the cast. (Misty Rowe, Preston Hanson, Terrence Locke; director, Larry Buchanan.)

HARRY AND WALTER GO TO NEW YORK (Columbia-Warner)

One suspects this of being conceived and cast by a computer programmed to produce the funniest period heist movie ever, but the result is a charmless mish-mash, in which the only element really worth salvaging is Harry Horner's art direction. (Elliot Gould, James Caan, Diane Keaton, Michael Caine; director, Mark Rydell.)

LAST HARD MEN, THE

(Fox-Rank)
Another end-of-the-line Western, about an ageing ex-Marshall (Charlton Heston) and his ageing arch-enemy (James Coburn) keeping one last shoot-out ahead of automobiles, telephones and superannuation. Script and direction seem equally tired. (Barbara Hershey, Christopher Mitchum, Michael Parks; director, Andrew V. McLaglen.)

*LET'S DO IT AGAIN (Columbia-Warner)

Energetic formula slapstick from Bill Cosby and Sidney Poitier, about two buddies from Atlanta pulling off an extravagant double-cross in New Orleans by hypnotising a puny prize fighter. A trifle over-long, but indefatigably bright and cheerful. (Calvin Lockhart; director, Sidney Poitier.)

LIPSTICK (CIC)

Foolish sermon about the treatment of rape in a society obsessed with processing sex appeal as another saleable commodity. Margaux Hemingway's performance does little to distinguish her from all the bric-à-brac on show, and the rapist is a similarly pre-packaged psychopath. (Chris Sarandon; director, Lamont Johnson.)

MESSAGE, THE (EMI)

Plodding, partial, excessively reverential, fully undramatic account of the last twenty years of the Prophet Mohammed's life. Expanding from Arab dollars on his feature debut, Hollywood TV director Moustapha Akkad ignores Mohammed's self-doubt, business acumen and canny marriages, and so fails to evoke much sense of the man himself. (Anthony Quinn, Irene Papas.)

MOTHER, JUGS & SPEED (Fox-Rank)

Peter Yates' frenetic attempt to bring the techniques of *M*A*S*H* to a callous tale of rival Los Angeles ambulance companies. Only Allen Garfield (company boss) and Bill Cosby (his chief driver) overcome the constraints of Tom Mankiewicz's unfocused script to let off the odd comic squib. (Harvey Keitel, Raquel Welch.)

*MURDER BY DEATH (Columbia-Warner)

Neil Simon's stylish parody of the mannerisms of a houseful of famous fictional detectives, invited by prankster Truman Capote to solve an as yet uncommitted murder. But polished performances fail to compensate for a vacuous and frustratingly tortuous plot. (Peter Sellers, Alec Guinness, James Coco, Maggie Smith, David Niven, Peter Falk; director, Robert Moore.)

*ODE TO BILLY JOE (Columbia-Warner)

Despite a few uncomfortable moments in Robby Benson's performance and Michel Legrand's saccharine score, a surprisingly evocative and moving tale of rural Mississippi in the mid-Fifties, suggested by Bobbie Gentry's hit song. Beautiful performances from Joan Hotchkis and James Best. (Glynnis O'Connor, Sandy McPeak; director, Max Baer.)

*OMEN, THE (Fox-Rank)

Relatively muted Satanic drama (despite one spectacular beheading), which even includes one or two visual tropes to suggest dark forces lurking just the other side of the everyday. Its dotty trump card is to cite the Common Market as proof of a prophecy from the Book of Revelation about the birth of the anti-Christ. (Gregory Peck, Lee Remick, David Warner; director, Richard Donner.)

*ORDERS (Contemporary)

Semi-documentary about people detained by the Canadian authorities following the FLQ

political kidnappings in 1970. Some special pleading is evident in the film's processes, and the historical context is largely omitted; but effective as a *Wrong Man* study of shock and dislocation. (Jean Lapointe, Claude Gauthier; director, Michel Brault.)

**OUTLAW JOSEY WALES, THE (Columbia-Warner)

Clint Eastwood's best film since *Play Misty for Me*: a revenge Western, superbly shot by Bruce Surtees, in which Eastwood wittily re-orchestrates both the familiar theme and his own gun-toting persona by playing them off against the bizarre string of characters met by the avenger en route. (Chief Dan George, Sondra Locke.) *Reviewed.*

**PICNIC AT HANGING ROCK (GTO)

Australian fantasy about a turn-of-the-century girls' boarding school, and how three of the pupils are swallowed without trace during a St. Valentine's Day excursion to the geological curiosity of Hanging Rock. Over-stuffed with Victorian cameos, crumbling at the edges, and with a swooning atmosphere of sexual mystery. (Rachel Roberts, Dominic Guard, Helen Morse; director, Peter Weir.) *Reviewed.*

*REQUIEM FOR A VILLAGE (BFI)

Highly curious exploration of pastoral agrarian England as seen in the past history of a Suffolk village before the onset of housing estates and motorways. Unlike Peter Hall in *Akenfield*, director David Gladwell never attempts to mix conscious art with slices of life: this is art all the way, with people rising from graves in slow motion.

SAILOR WHO FELL FROM GRACE WITH THE SEA, THE (Fox-Rank)

Mishima 'written for the screen' by Lewis John Carlino turns out to be not Mishima at all but a silly tale of gravely romantic adults and spiteful English schoolboys, sprinkled with nudity and violence. Carlino himself directs, his style veering bewilderingly from the enjoyably crisp to the laughably inflated. (Sarah Miles, Kris Kristofferson.)

*SECRET, THE (Contemporary)

Philippe Noiret's warm portrayal of a slovenly layabout pressed into action and commitment by a mysterious stranger in trouble (Jean-Louis Trintignant) provides the main spark of interest in this efficient but routine thriller. Easy to watch, easy to forget. (Marlene Jobert, Jean-François Adam; director, Robert Enrico.)

*SHOOTIST, THE (CIC)

The John Wayne legend, set in a rather stiff theatrical context (the movie largely happens indoors) and with blatant biographical references in its story of a dying gunfighter. But Don Siegel gives it an odd, fidgety life, crossing the autumnal mythology with cantankerous domesticity. (Lauren Bacall, James Stewart.) *Reviewed.*

SPECIAL DELIVERY (Fox-Rank)

Robbery plan goes wrong, and Bo Svenson and Cybill Shepherd respond solidly to the romantic comedy demands of what develops. But the last third (night, a sleazy Los Angeles square, everybody lurking by the mail-box where the loot has been parked) is turned into a weird little *kammerspiel* by director Paul Wendkos.

*SQUIRM (Brent-Walker)

Killer worms overwhelm a backwoods town in this neatly finished, consistently enjoyable low-budget spine-chiller. Distinguished by flourishes of black humour and restrained, genuinely ghoulish effects; director Jeff Lieberman juggles

with both in the nail-biting climax as hero and heroine flee from a worm-ridden but indefatigable villain. (John Scardino, Patricia Pearcy.)

**STAY HUNGRY (United Artists)

A bizarre tale about a wealthy orphan (Jeff Bridges) joining forces with a weight-lifting group focuses Bob Rafelson's wry metropolitan sensibility on a gallery of Southern grotesques. Disappointing after *The King of Marvin Gardens*, but with many intriguing flights of fancy and offbeat tangents. (Arnold Schwarzenegger, Sally Field, Helena Kallianiotes.) *Reviewed.*

*STOOLIE, THE (Fox-Rank)

Vivid, likeably unpretentious John G. Avildsen film (made just before *Save the Tiger*) about a sordid little police informer/drug pusher who decides to get away from it all, and the pursuing cop who discovers that in a lousy world the stoolie's offence is not so rank after all. (Jackie Mason, Dan Frazer, Marcia Jean Kurtz.)

**TENANT, THE (CIC)

Kafkaesque Polanski film in which an expatriate Polish Jew in Paris (played by Polanski himself), suffering from delusions of persecution, begins turning into the girl who committed suicide in his flat before he moved in. Clever, witty, hypnotic, but flawed by 'international' production values and a facile ending. (Isabelle Adjani, Melvyn Douglas, Shelley Winters.) *Reviewed.*

*UNDERGROUND (Black Ink)

Radical film-maker Emile de Antonio and professional image-maker Haskell Wexler confront a group of young militants from the Weather underground in conditions of theatrical secrecy. Their discourse deals largely in political rhetoric, and interspersed clips constitute a kind of Top of the Pops of radical causes.

**WELCOME TO BRITAIN (Cinegate)

Engaging, sprightly film from former National Film School student Ben Lewin, dealing with the labyrinthine troubles of arriving immigrants and the amazing attempts of Reuben Davis ('Mr. Fix-it') to solve them. Davis' brazen presence dominates throughout, reducing the film's objectivity but boosting its entertainment value. *Reviewed.*

*WHO'S THAT KNOCKING AT MY DOOR (Cinegate)

Juvenilia by Martin Scorsese, exhibiting early traces of *Mean Streets* and a lively use of rock singles. Hampered by an interpolated sex fantasy and a sparse number of New York locations, but the heated Scorsese style is already in evidence. (Harvey Keitel, Zina Bethune.)

*WIVES (Contemporary)

Lively Norwegian feminist tract in which three women face up to self-examination and disintegrating marriages on a spree away from husbands and children. Director Anja Breien's improvisational method poses more questions than it can answer, but fresh performances by Anne Marie Ottersen, Frøydis Armand and Katja Medboe provide a commendable counter-weight to Cassavetes' *Husbands*.

WON TON TON, THE DOG WHO SAVED HOLLYWOOD (CIC)

The knockabout trials of an overweight Twenties Alsatian movie star afford Michael Winner the opportunity to marshal but not control a straggling parade of semi-retired Hollywood stars. The thin plot collapses under the tonnage of below par sight gags and one-liners. (Madeline Kahn, Bruce Dern, Art Carney.)

ALL THE QUEEN'S PUPPIES —P.T.U.S.— CONFESSIONS OF A POLO PLAYER

You know, I've never cried like that before

Crowd's thinner than ever tonight... could it be the popcorn...

Roll up! Roll up! Green Stamps with every ticket!

Did you see - that other cinema has something about squatters in the 17th century

Worse darling - 17th century communists!

PLEASE QUEUE HERE

It's expensive It's smoky, and the films are degrading. I'm going over there.

You never complained before you joined that group

YOU'LL CRY LIKE YOU NEVER CRIED BEFORE

Madam, there are 54 other cinemas in the West End alone

But mean THE OTHER CINEMA the new one

Gee, boss, this is the tenth outlaw film we've seen here

Shut up, you mite join something

You know, they've got that eleven hour film on China next month

Depends: if they have a real ale

Right? On... I'd like tickets for all three films

Are you staying for the discussion?

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the Other cinema WINSTANLEY

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